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**METHODISM AND THE COMMON PEOPLE
OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

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Methodism and the Working-Class Movements of England, 1800-1850

METHODISM
AND THE
COMMON PEOPLE
OF THE
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

BY
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TO THE VILLAGE CHAPEL
BY THE WAYSIDE, OXHILL

*(Oxhill is a little place of
a few hundred inhabitants
in the County of Durham)*



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PREFACE

NO attempt has been made in these studies to assess the value of the Methodist influence in Scotland, Wales and Ireland, nor to describe the impact, spiritual and social, the Dissenting denominations made on the life of eighteenth-century England. The Three denominations valiantly fought for religious and civil freedom and the whole story is indeed a long and noble epic. It was on ground and opportunities won and reclaimed by them that Methodism built its own special structure. But Methodism also derived benefit and advantage from connection with the Established Church, a kinship which tended on occasions to soften the severity and bitterness of hostility and persecution. What Methodism owes to its religious parentage, and what England owes, I have scarcely touched upon. The recital would occupy a separate volume.

I express my deep and sincere thanks to the depleted staffs of the British Museum and Dr. Williams's Library for courtesies that never failed, consideration instant and kindly, a traditional eagerness to help an author in his quest of manifold information. And with special emphasis I must acknowledge my debt to Mr. Sydney Walton, C.B.E., M.A., B.Litt., of the White Cottage, Harrow, a native of my own county of Durham, for wise advice, warm encouragement, and hours upon hours of time and thought ungrudgingly given to reading the typescript and suggesting revisions.

To the London School of Economics and to Mr. H. L. Beales, my former tutor and economic adviser, I acknowledge a continual obligation. My thanks are also expressed to the Rev. John H. Watkins for reading the proof.

Finally, to a little Methodist chapel by the wayside my gratitude goes out every day I live. In those walls a light broke in upon my young spirit and in due time the call to the ministry of the Word of Life came to me there.

ROBERT F. WEARMOUTH

Introduction

JOHN WESLEY AND METHODISM

IF the number of children born into the home of Dr. Annesley, one-time Vicar of Cripplegate in London, later a famous Dissenting minister and divine, had been limited to twenty-four, or if the size of the family of the Rev. Samuel Wesley, poverty-stricken Rector of the Parish of Epworth, had been confined to fourteen, it is wellnigh certain there would have been no Methodism in the annals of the eighteenth century. Had the boy John Wesley, before he reached the age of seven, been burnt to death in the midnight fire which almost enveloped him, ultimately destroying the Rectory, the possibility of a religious revival would have been greatly diminished. If, perchance, the High Church missionary to Georgia in 1735 had succumbed to the attractions of Sophia Hopkey, married her as his natural impulses prompted, made a home on her uncle's estate in accordance with that gentleman's wish, there can be no doubt that Methodism, an acorn planted at Oxford, would never have grown into a tree of marvellous stature. If Mary Vazeille, the wealthy widow whom John Wesley eventually married in February, 1751, had provided her second husband with a comfortable home, transforming herself into an amiable wife, the traveller-evangelist might have become a stay-at-home, like his brother Charles in later life; in that event the Methodism started in Bristol and London during 1739 might have perished for want of spiritual leadership and eager organization. If the little man of unshakeable courage had died of tuberculosis in 1753 when his friends thought his end was a foregone conclusion and he himself had made an epitaph ready, it is questionable whether the Methodism he created could have survived.

The mere recital of these 'ifs' reveals the delicacy of the threads on which the future and the fabric of Methodism trembled. And the 'ifs' prove how much the development and expansion of the new movement depended on the life and health and circumstances of a single individual. History is often biography. Methodism has grown into a great religious community. After two hundred years more than thirty million adherents are enrolled within it. Wesley's followers are to be

found in most parts of the inhabited globe. In Europe, Africa, Asia, America, China, India, and in every part of the British Empire, there are people who accept Wesley's doctrines and pursue his methods. Methodism, successful and far-flung, cannot boast of a traditional hierarchy; it possesses no list of prelates and priests, makes no claims to unbroken connection with the Apostolic Fathers. But, belonging to the modern world, its roots reach deeply into the New Testament. As a Church it is still young and therefore capable of further and extraordinary achievements.

Other movements drawing inspiration from the Christian religion have made remarkable progress. In the early centuries *Anno Domini* the work of the first Apostles brought astonishing results; Christianity spread through Palestine, crossed into Europe and Asia, entered Northern Africa, penetrated into India, reached as far as China. In three hundred years Christianity had become 'the most favoured State religion' in the mighty Roman Empire. In later centuries the Protestant Reformation, inaugurated by the courage of Martin Luther, spread with surprising rapidity through the greater part of the Western world; dynasties were overthrown, new kingdoms established, free and vigorous nationalities arose.

The rise of Monasticism with various 'Orders'; the reforms instituted by Pope Gregory the Great (590-604); the influence of St. Francis of Assisi and his 'Preaching Friars'; the great era of Roman Catholic Missions in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; the activities of Wycliffe, 'the first great teacher of "Protestantism" in England'; the labours of the Lollards in England and the work of the Hussites on the Continent; in recent times the rapid expansion of Roman Catholicism in America; these all in varying degrees are expressions of the growth and advance of the Christian religion. In sweep and scope of influence and in speed of advance Methodism has outstripped them all.

From the heart and mind of John Wesley, from his dedication, absolute and unfaltering, to the gospel of the Christ, the Methodist Movement emerged. He was its founder, its genius, its guide and leader. He was born at Epworth in the county of Lincolnshire on June 17, 1703. The first-born may be an event, the second an episode, the rest merely incidents. The birth of John Wesley, one in a large family, occasioned but little excitement. He was simply another addition to the family circle

at Epworth Rectory. Eighty-seven years later, as six men, poor and lowly in estate, carried his body to the grave, thousands upon thousands mourned the loss of one beloved. One of the greatest sons of England, one of the finest apostles of the Christian faith, had passed from mortal sight.

The ancestors of John Wesley for three generations were gentlefolk by birth, scholars by learning, and clergymen by choice. On his father's side he could claim descent from Adam Loftus (1533-1605), once Primate of Ireland and Archbishop of Armagh and Dublin.¹ His more immediate forebears had been clergymen by training, then Dissenters for conscience's sake. Bartholomew Westley, his great grandfather, had been ejected from the rectorship of Charmouth, Dorsetshire, in 1662 for refusing to conform to the requirements of the Uniformity Act. During the same year the son of Bartholomew and the namesake of John Wesley was ejected from the living at Winterborn-Whitchurch and exposed to privations, leading to early decease. His grandfather on the mother's side was the famous Dr. Annesley who suffered expulsion from the Cripplegate vicarage. Sufferings borne and indignities and persecutions endured by their ancestors were apparently forgotten and forgiven by Samuel Wesley, the grandson of Bartholomew Westley, and the amiable daughter of Dr. Annesley, whom he took to himself in holy matrimony. The two of them went back to the fold of the Established Church and spent the greater part of their wedded life in the parish of Epworth, constantly struggling against misfortune, barely able to keep the wolf from the door.

Samuel Wesley, the son of the first and the father of the second John Wesley, was a loyal Churchman, a humble and reverent scholar, a devoted clergyman. His learned wife, Susannah Wesley, was the twenty-fifth child of prolific parents. In spite of manifold and most pressing domestic duties and anxieties, she found time and opportunity to exercise a gracious influence over the lives of her numerous children. An austerity almost ascetic, deeply religious, and highly intellectual permeated the household. John was the fifteenth child of a family of nineteen. Though one among so many, his education and training were not neglected. His mother gave him his first tuition. Shortly after reaching the age of ten, he was sent to Charterhouse. On June 24, 1720, he was elected scholar of

¹ *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 34, p. 73.

Christ Church, Oxford. He graduated Bachelor of Arts four years later. At that time he had no thought of taking Holy Orders. The decision was made in the following year. His mother approved of it and advised him to study practical divinity. On September 19, 1725, he was ordained deacon by Dr. Potter, then Bishop of Oxford. His first sermon was preached on October 16 at South Leigh, near Witney in Oxfordshire. In 1726 he was made Fellow of Lincoln College, having obtained his Master of Arts that same year. Twelve months later he was ordained a priest, shortly after becoming his father's curate, living and officiating mainly at Wroote. A letter from Dr. Morley in November, 1729, recalled him to Lincoln College to take up his duties as Fellow. 'It was judged necessary', ran the official summons, 'in the interests of discipline and good government that the junior fellows who should be chosen as moderators shall in person attend the duties of their office.'¹ In 1734 his father desired him to be his successor at Epworth, but the cloisters prevailed against the parsonage. Strange to relate, he went a year later to Georgia, accompanied by his brother Charles; they went as missionaries to the Indians. John Wesley desired 'to learn the true sense of the Gospel of Christ by preaching it to others'.² Georgia was an unhappy episode; he returned to England in the early days of 1738. His brother Charles had come back a few months before. John's experiences as a missionary gave him cause for deep reflection; he began to examine his life still more minutely. The night of May 24, 1738 (he was thirty-five years of age), was lighted with a sudden splendour of spiritual significance; the date ultimately became memorable in English and religious history. From the commencement of that year he had been under the influence of a pious Moravian, Peter Böhler by name, and had learnt from him something of the meaning of 'Justification by Faith'. He had also been much moved by reading William Law's *The Serious Call*, a volume slender in size but rich and ripe in holy wisdom. Law laid emphasis on the consecration of the whole life to the claims of religion. That May night John Wesley somewhat reluctantly attended a meeting in Aldersgate Street in London. Listening to a young man who read Luther's *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans*, Wesley felt his heart strangely warmed. He felt that by

¹ *John Wesley's Works*, vol. 1, pp. 101-2. Further references will be described as *Works*.

² *Ibid.*, vol. 12, p. 38.

faith he was saved; he did believe in the living Christ; he experienced the joy of sins forgiven.

That May night in Aldersgate Street profoundly affected Wesley; he was transformed; in the language of the New Testament, he was born again. His life, work, and preaching were entirely different afterwards. Convinced that he had found the way and the gladness of salvation, he was consumed with zeal to proclaim the tidings to others. He found insufficient opportunity in the Established Church; in April, 1739, he began to speak in the open air. Huge crowds gathered to hear the preaching of the gospel. He was heartened by the response of multitudes to the words of life. He felt certain he was engaged in doing God's work; the call was clear and definite and to it he dedicated his gifts, his powers, his days; it was a complete and concentrated offering, all-absorbing and sovereign. The task he set himself had to be done whatever the cost; no hardship could restrain him. Through pelting rain and burning sun, through blinding snow and biting frost, through 'wind and weather' he travelled across the length and breadth of Britain. 'Regardless of fatigue, personal danger, and disgrace, he went into the highways and hedges calling sinners to repentance and preaching the Gospel of peace.'¹ For more than fifty years he continued this work, travelling on an average at least 4,500 miles a year, though roads were bad, if roads they could be called, and transport difficult. Before the close of his life he saw a remarkable change, not only in the individual lives of his followers, but also in the growth of 'a sense of decency, morals and religion' in the hearts of 'the lowest classes of mankind'.²

That is only part of the story, noble as it is. He succeeded in establishing Societies throughout the United Kingdom and made Methodism a great religious power in the land. But in addition he was the chief instrument in the inauguration of the spiritual awakening known as the Evangelical Revival, the influence of which in one form or another became manifest in churches of every type and kind, and affected our national life and history. Even to-day the influence of that awakening affects the whole of the English-speaking peoples. It has gone out to the uttermost parts of the earth and has penetrated into dark regions of the world.

¹ *Journal*, vol. 4, p. 531. Everyman's Ed. *Journal* will be used throughout for *John Wesley's Journal*.

² *Annual Register*, 1791, pp. 278-9.

Other effects of Wesley's labours are still to be seen. 'No doubt he played no small part in saving England from the madness that fell upon France ere the century closed.'¹ 'His influence must have contributed most powerfully towards preserving the existing framework of society, especially when the shocks of the French Revolution were already being felt.'² 'No man lived nearer the centre than John Wesley, neither Clive nor Pitt, neither Mansfield nor Johnson. You cannot cut him out of our national life.'³ Being a natural captain of men, he marshalled them for his divinely chosen campaign, always maintaining their strict allegiance by his dominating personality. His 'genius for government was not inferior to that of Richelieu'.⁴ Throughout the greater part of his life he exercised the office of 'an educator', 'a social reformer', and a successful evangelist. He accomplished this threefold task by means of his scholarship, his organizing ability, and his spoken and printed word. Nature and training had fitted him to be a leader of others. Possessing an even temper, a strong will, a fine patience, a serene intelligence, and a passionate faith, he pursued his mission and his pilgrimage. His physical features helped. The fascinating eyes, the transparent sincerity, the appeal to the reason and the emotions, the clear voice, the penetrating insight, the dignity and lucidity of utterance, the personal courage, the summons to conscience, all conspired to make him a preacher renowned and powerful. That 'marvellous body', those 'muscles of whipcord', 'lungs of leather', and 'bones of steel' provided him with remarkable human equipment for immense labours and journeyings. With courage, tact, magnanimity, and resourcefulness in a supreme degree, he won his widening way and pressed on to the goal he set himself. Adopting the 'plan of Itinerant Preaching' in the early days of his campaign, he became in due course 'the Patron and Friend of the Lay Preacher'. He supported charitable institutions and by his personal influence established a new religious system in the land.⁵

Although John Wesley exercised such a tremendous influence for good over others, he was not free from human faults. He

¹ Woodrow Wilson, *John Wesley's Place in History*, pp. 42-3.

² H. W. V. Temperley, *Cambridge Modern History*. 'The Age of Walpole and the Pelhams', vol. 6. p. 87.

³ Augustine Birrell, *Selected Essays*, 1884-1907, p. 122.

⁴ Macaulay's *Literary Essays*, p. 374.

⁵ *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 70, p. 313.

believed in supernatural interventions and Satanic interferences. Placing implicit faith in the results of the cast lot, he would accept in moments of uncertainty the decisions of mere chance. The ghostly apparitions at the Epworth Rectory in 1716-17 were described by him as preternatural interferences. Many of the incidents experienced in his journeys received a similar interpretation. His private correspondence shows how weak he could be in the presence of feminine influences. 'All through his life Wesley never comes so near the point of being absurd as when he is in love, or is in the earliest stages of love.'¹ Take, for example, his flirtations with 'Varanese' and his reference to her as 'Cyrus' when writing to 'Aspasia'. His love-affair with Sophia Christiana Hopkey in Georgia was a strange story, simple-mindedness and emotions of revenge, naïveté, and annoyance weaving in a quaint tapestry. Undecided and hesitant about proposing marriage, he referred the decision to the judgement of the Moravian Bishop, Nitchmann; he accepted the verdict, although it ran counter to his natural feelings and desires. When the girl herself had lost patience with his dalliance and married another, there were signs of vindictiveness in the ecclesiastical penalties Wesley imposed upon her for assumed spiritual delinquency. His behaviour was inexcusable and several charges were laid against him; unfriendly and hostile discussions ensued, and he found it necessary to flee from the settlement. His love-affair with Nurse Murray, who suddenly changed her mind and married one of his preachers, reveals a curious simplicity and inexplicable weakness. When at last he takes himself a wife, he chooses a wealthy widow after consulting a friend. The union turned out to be most unhappy. The climax came in 1776, when she decided to leave him, the primary cause being jealousy of some of his women workers. She acted rather foolishly, allowing her passions to run high. But Wesley's absorbing interest in his work unfitted him for conjugal companionship. Lesser devotions became submerged. His manifold labours and constant travelling did not allow him to give time to duties domestical and matters marital.

A popular authoress, skilled in the writing of fiction, has done her best to belittle John Wesley's character and influence. Here are a few excerpts from her indictment, a few facts embroidered with fancy: 'Under this disguise of divine inspiration his human wish to rule and govern was indulged; he overbore, alarmed,

¹ Fitchet, *Life of John Wesley*, p. 87.

intimidated by his intense energy and his strong mental powers.’¹ ‘In Methodism John Wesley had a powerful organization under his control.’ ‘He chose to use this power . . . merely to enforce his own opinions on an increasing number of the population.’² ‘He had truly created a God in his own image.’ ‘This God was a counterpart of John Wesley himself, had all his own virtues and all his own faults, and in serving God John Wesley was serving himself; his highest ideals, his worldly arrogance and pride, his credulity, his intelligence that he tried to stifle . . . his great faults like intolerance, little faults like jealousy . . . all these, compounded out of his own heart and brain, made the God whom John Wesley so dutifully served.’³

Miss Marjorie Bowen is far from being first in the field. Libels like hers, and even worse, were circulated by some of his contemporaries. Few men were more maligned in his own day and generation, but essential goodness will out. Not by any personal magnetism, not by intolerance, but by service and self-sacrifice he won his wondrous place in English history. Had Wesley sought preferment, he might have had it. Had he tried to fly his kite according to the wishes of some of his ecclesiastical critics, he might have occupied a high place in the hierarchy of the Established Church. But he minded not the wishes and opinions of mere man. He got his conception of duty from the New Testament, from the Bible, which, according to Miss Bowen, is a ‘medley of fiction, romance, poetry, ethics, and superstition’.⁴ His ideas about Heaven and Hell, dubbed by the ‘same authoress as ‘terrible falsehoods’ implanted in ‘shivering hearts’, were taken from the same source.

Frailties he had on which slanderous tongues were swift to fix and to which his enemies rejoiced to give credence, but he created a mighty institution and added to the greatness of our race. Methodism, it must be remembered, was not made by John Wesley alone. There were others. His brother Charles, also a clergyman, who worked with him for many years, sharing the hatred and the obloquy cast upon all the early Methodists. George Whitefield, the eloquent, co-operated with the two brothers. The itinerant and lay preachers whom the Wesleys called into service made a most valuable contribution. And there was a great host of people, unnamed, unhonoured, and unsung, who gave hospitality of heart and mind and home,

¹ Marjorie Bowen, *Wrestling Jacob*, p. 235.

² *Ibid.*, p. 315.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 381.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

who toiled and laboured for the cause, who were the strength of the weekly meetings, and added the momentum of their lives.

Though Methodism in various ways affected the whole of the English people, its influence on the poorer classes was the most profound and abiding. How widespread and deep that influence was is the subject of this book.



Section One

THE CONDITION OF THE COMMON PEOPLE

CHAPTER I

MANIFOLD DISORDERS

A CAREFUL survey of the period 1740 to 1800 reveals the evidence that discontent continuously prevailed and serious disorders frequently occurred. During the first decade of 1740 to 1750, apart from the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, the year 1740 appears to have been the most disturbing. Beginning with the last Saturday in April, a four days' riot broke out in the neighbourhood of Dewsbury and Wakefield as 'a mob from Dewsbury, Battley, Earls Heaton and other adjacent villages' endeavoured to stop a load of meal and flour going into Lancashire. Having failed in this evil design, they damaged some mills at Dewsbury and Thornhill, and rudely assaulted Sir John Kaye and the High Sheriff. While advancing against the mill belonging to Joseph Pollard with the intent to destroy it, they were met by an unexpected defence and several of them were wounded. Going into Wakefield on the Tuesday, they boastingly declared 'they were come to release those prisoners, and that they would pull down Pollard's house, hang him up, and skin him like a rat'. The arrival of the military and the courageous conduct of a local magistrate put an end to their dangerous desire. Before they were dispersed Captain Burton, the magistrate in question, 'knocked down three or four of them with his stick and took . . . six or seven of them prisoners'.¹

Other disturbances occurred almost simultaneously at Kettering and Peterborough. At the former place a huge crowd, under the pretence of playing a football match of five hundred a side, secretly designed 'to pull down Ed. Betey Germain's Mills', while at the latter place the rioters were so numerous that they succeeded in freeing some of their imprisoned comrades.²

A more disturbing affair took place at Stockton between

¹ S.P., 36, 50. *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, May 10, 1740. *Weekly Miscellany*, May 17, 1740. (S.P. means *State Papers*, 36 refers to the group classification, and 50 to the number of the parcel.)

² S.P., 36, 50 and 51.

May 19 and 22. Three thousand rioters officially described as 'idle and disorderly Persons' showed their resentment at the increase of prices by trying to prevent the export of grain. Having committed 'several outrageous Acts', they were finally dispersed by a combined attack of the military and the Sedgfield Posse. A further disturbance occurred in the streets of Durham as seven of their number were being carted to gaol. In the tussle that ensued between the guard and the populace three of the prisoners made their escape.¹

Animated by the same unhappy desire, 'Several Hundred Persons' from Colchester 'rose in a tumultuous manner' and stopped 'two waggons loaded with meal' from being sent out of the town. Four weeks later, when the military received orders to move to another place, some of the local merchants and gentlemen sent a petition to the State Secretary praying for them to be permitted to stay a while longer because of the fear of 'greater outrages' from 'a lot of Unthinking and Ill-designing persons'.² The threatened outrage was apparently committed in East Dony land, where 'a large Quantity of Flower' intended for shipment to other parts was suddenly seized and carried away.³ Extending their sphere of operations, the Colchester mob went to Manningtree, at which place they commandeered 'two loads and a half of wheat', and vowed to 'pull down the granaries and mill too', if, on their return, no meal was found.⁴

Towards the end of May the town of Dover became the scene of 'an insurrection' when a crowd of women 'rose in a tumultuous manner, cut the sacks, and took away the Grain that some farmers were bringing to the Ports for shipping'. Resenting the attempts to export corn when prices were high, these women 'pelted the Teams and their Drivers with Stones for three miles out of Town'.⁵ 'For wanting to lower the Price of Spinning from seven knots to nine knots a Penny', 'an eminent Master Webster' of Bocking in Essex incurred the anger of his workmen. Forming themselves into 'a tumultuous mob', they threatened to destroy both him and his property. But happily for both parties they failed to carry out their evil desire.⁶

A more serious outrage occurred at Newcastle on June 5, after 'the voracious factors', promising to reduce the price of

¹ S.P., 36, 51. *Weekly Miscellany*, June 28, 1740.

² S.P., 36, 51. *Ipswich Journal*, May 24, 1740.

³ *Ipswich Journal*, June 14, 1740, taken from the *Colchester Journal*, June 13, 1740.

⁴ S.P., 36, 51.

⁵ *Ipswich Journal*, May 31, 1740.

⁶ *Ibid.*, June 7, 1740.

their grain, failed to carry out their promise. Already angered by this betrayal, a crowd of colliers and keelmen became extremely violent when one of their number was killed by a misguided gentleman. Breathing out revenge, they marched to the Guildhall, where the magistrates were assembled, and 'fell to plundering and destroying all about them'. 'All the Books, Deeds, and Records of the Town and its courts' were thrown out of the window and trampled upon or destroyed. Not satisfied with this destruction, they seized all the available money and carried off at least £1,000.¹

Before the end of June the town of Wisbech became the scene of great disorder. Incensed by an increase in the price of provisions, a number of rioters made several attempts 'to take away corn to prevent its exportation'. After seizing more than twenty-five 'Lasts of Wheat', they quickly disposed of it by selling it at a penny to fourpence a bushel. Visiting some of the shopkeepers, they collected or appropriated 'near fourscore pounds'. Having retired to Upwell, about sixty of them were arrested by some gentlemen who had hired five hundred mercenaries to assist in quelling the disturbances.²

The city of Norwich at this time did not escape the fever of unrest. Commencing with Sunday, July 6, a five days riot began, when some fishermen advanced the price of their mackerel to twopence after crying, 'Three half-pence a Piece'. The situation grew more dangerous when 'the meanest of the People began to be very tumultuous'. Visiting all the bakers in the vicinity, they affixed a note to every door saying 'Wheat at Sixteen Shillings a Comb'. After the Mayor had committed some of them to prison, the remainder retaliated by attacking the prison and finally succeeded in releasing their comrades. 'A great deal of mischief' was perpetrated in the next few days, when the dwelling-houses of the Mayor and Alderman Black were severely damaged. Going to the river, they seized a boat, sold its contents, paraded the town, and extorted money and provisions from many of the inhabitants.³

Though of less importance, five other disturbances occurred before the end of the year. When two wagons 'loaded with twenty-four Bags of fine Flower' were being sent from Derby to

¹ S.P., 36, 51. *Daily Post*, July 2 and 3, 1740.

² S.P., 36, 51. *Gent's. Mag.*, p. 355. (*Gent's. Mag.* is the abbreviation for *Gentleman's Magazine*.) *Ipswich Journal*, July 12, 1740.

³ S.P., 36, 51. *Gent's. Mag.*, p. 356. *Ipswich Journal*, July 19 and 26, 1740. *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, July 22, 1740.

Leek in Staffordshire, they were stopped and brought back to the market place, where the bags were cut and the contents carried away. Although the Mayor and magistrates endeavoured to prevent the outrage, 'not above two Bags were preserved'.¹ At Saffron-Walden the mills of John Windstanley and Henry Archer were forcibly opened and a quantity of corn taken away.² On Monday, September 22, 'a great number of colliers' belonging to Kingswood marched towards the city of Bristol in order 'to complain to the magistrates of the excessive price of wheat'. Hearing of the readiness of the military to meet them, they returned to their homes without doing any damage.³ Colchester once more became the scene of disorder when, on November 24, 'a great number of disorderly People in Magdalene-street assembled in a riotous manner and stopt two waggons, one of which was loaded with wheat, which they threatened to seize'. With the appearance of the military the rioters quickly dispersed.⁴ In the county of Staffordshire, according to report, the good intentions of a local gentleman were rendered abortive because a riotous mob had commandeered 'a quantity of Corn, Cheese, etc.' which he had designed to sell to the poor at a cheaper rate.⁵

With the improvement of the economic situation after the spring of 1741, the poorer classes became more tranquil, though a two days' riot broke out in Blyth in the first month of that year. Several colliers, it was said, had broken 'forcibly into the Granaries of Mr. Foster and . . . destroyed and carried away to the Value of 500£ of fine wheat'. In addition to this outrage, they 'rifled the Granaries of Mr. Philip Jubb, and did considerable damage'.⁶ Later in the year the neighbourhood of Bradford and Trowbridge in Wiltshire was greatly disturbed by the fear of 'another insurrection'. The weavers, apparently angry at the refusal of their masters to improve their wages, showed an inclination to violence, but they were quietened by the arrival of the military.⁷

From the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745 the working classes deliberately held aloof. Whatever sympathy they manifested was on the side of their country. An example of their attitude

¹ *Ipswich Journal*, July 19, 1740.

² *Ibid.*, July 26.

³ *S.P.*, 36, 52. *Daily Post*, September 30, 1740. *Ipswich Journal*, October 4, 1740.

⁴ *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, December 2, 1740.

⁵ *Daily Post*, December 12, 1740.

⁶ *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, February 3, 1741.

⁷ *S.P.*, 36, 56.

was seen at Sunderland early in 1746, when a number of sailors and apprentices 'armed with pistols and Cutlasses', 'attacked the Popish Chapple' and 'pulled down the house'.¹ A similar resentment was shown to the Roman Catholics at Liverpool on April 30 by 'a formidable Mobb of people' which demolished 'the Romanish Chapel' and burnt 'the furniture of the Chapel and houses belonging to it'.²

The tranquillity of the next four years was broken by at least two disturbances, the one in Cornwall and the other in Bristol. In the October of 1748 intelligence to the Secretary of State tells of 'Diverse Tinnners and other Persons . . . going into Penrhyn, breaking into cellars and stealing from thence' 'Diverse Quantities of Bushels of wheat'.³ In order to quell this 'extraordinary riot' the Mayor and Recorder of the town recommended to the Duke of Bedford that he should put 'the names of the offenders into the Gazette'.⁴

A more serious affair is reported from Bristol in the August of 1749; farmers and peasants repeatedly destroyed the toll gates on the roads leading into the city. On Monday, July 24, 'a great number of Somersetsh people' 'demolished the turnpike gates near Bedminster on the Ashton road'. 'A body of Gloucestersh people . . . some naked with their faces blacked' destroyed on the following day 'the turnpike gates and house at Don John's cross'. By Thursday, August 3, 'almost all the turnpikes and turnpike houses about the city' had been demolished, Ashton Road turnpike having been destroyed three times.⁵

Numerous disturbances continued to be a feature of the next ten years. From three different places labour troubles were reported in the early part of 1750. Intelligence from Tiverton on January 16 tells of 'great disorders and some skirmishes between the woolcombers and the weavers . . . on account of the merchants introducing Irish worsted'.⁶ Three months later 'riotous proceedings of the weavers and other woollen manufacturers' took place at Trowbridge, Bradford, and Melksham.⁷ At Newcastle-on-Tyne the keelmen remained on strike for more than six weeks because they could not get the wages they desired. In order to compel them to submit to the masters' terms, the local magistrates arrested some of the ringleaders and sent others as vagrants back to their settlements in Scotland. It was not

¹ S.P., 36, 80.

² *Ibid.*, 83.

³ *Ibid.*, 36, 108.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Gent's Mag.*, 1749, pp. 376-7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1750, p. 187.

⁷ *Ibid.*

surprising that a few of their comrades were infected after this with the spirit of disloyalty.

According to one report, five of their number expressed unkind sentiments at a style in Elswick Fields. 'I proclaim Prince Charlie King of England,' cried one of them. 'Amen', responded the other four. The authorities were so alarmed at this disclosure that a sum of £200 was offered as a reward to anyone revealing their identity.¹

Further signs of disaffection were expressed at Walsall and Shrewsbury in the course of the next few weeks. At the former place an effigy of the King with a 'Bunch of Turnips under its arm' was dragged along the muddy streets by a riotous mob and finally burnt to ashes.² At the latter place 'the honest lads of Shrewsbury' were invited by advertisements on the walls 'to wear their swords' and 'use them as men, as English men, as men of courage'.³

A different kind of disorder was reported from Manchester in the following September. Expressing fierce disapproval of the public whipping of a woman and three men, the angry populace 'insulted the magistrates and used some treasonable expressions'. When the military intervened, two of the rioters were killed and two others wounded.⁴

Only one food riot was reported in the year 1751; 'many hundreds of People, Part of them Inhabitants of the Forest of Dean and Part of the Town of Ross and Places adjacent', believing that wheat was being sent down the river on the way to France, stopped the barges at Welton and Tilbrook and offered money to the owners to take them back. Those who refused had their boats emptied and the wheat carried away.⁵

Further disorders broke out in Bradford, Wiltshire, in the spring of 1752. Because of a 'tumult among the weavers', thirty of them 'were seized and committed to prison'. Breathing out revenge against the magistrates, about a thousand of their comrades marched to the prison, carrying 'Bludgeons and Fire Arms', 'drove away the Guard . . . released their companions', 'and carried them off in triumph'.⁶

Food riots became more frequent in the following year. On Friday, May 11, 'Above 700 coal miners' assembled at Shepton Mallet and on the 'pretence of the great quantity of corn ex-

¹ S.P., 36, 112. *Norwich Mercury*, May 5, 1750.

² S.P., 36, 113, 116. *Gent's Mag.*, 1750, p. 331.

³ S.P., 36, 113.

⁴ *Gent's Mag.*, 1750, p. 427.

⁵ S.P., 36, 116.

⁶ *Norwich Mercury*, March 14 and May 2, 1752. *Gent's Mag.*, 1752, p. 236.

ported' they 'went to the inns where the corn was lodged, and obliged the owners to sell at the price they thought proper'.¹ A few days later some 'disorderly persons' from Kingswood 'armed with sticks' marched into Bristol to protest against the high price of grain. Being dissatisfied with the attitude of the magistrates, they went to the river and rifled a ship that was intended for Dublin. When the constables appeared, 'the Rioters took to Stones and Brick Batts', and after forcing their way to the Council House they broke the windows of the House and injured a number of persons. 'Several of the rioters were slain . . . and between thirty and forty taken prisoners'. An attempt to rescue them was afterwards made, but the attackers were repulsed by the posse and the constables.²

Resentment against turnpikes was the cause of serious trouble in the West Riding during the month of June. Writing on June 27, Lord Urwin tells the Duke of Newcastle that some 'Rioters have destroy'd all the Turnpikes about Leeds and threaten more mischief'. When some of them went to Harewood Bridge they met with a hostile reception. Mr. Lascelles, it was said, 'gallantly thrashed them and took ten prisoners'. In spite of this repulse, some of their comrades succeeded in destroying the turnpike at Wakefield.³ A similar attempt at Beeston resulted in disaster for some of the rioters. As the magistrates were examining a number of prisoners, the angry mob attacked the inn where the trial took place. They broke the windows, knocked down the guard, and drove the magistrates from the room. When the military retaliated, ten of the rioters were killed, twenty-four being wounded.⁴

While the menfolk of Yorkshire were exploding their anger against the toll houses and turnpike gates, the women of Taunton were venting their feelings against the high price of provisions. Believing that prices had been enhanced by sending commodities to other parts, they demolished a 'French Wear' while 'the men stood looking on, giving the women many huzzars . . . for their dexterity in the work'.⁵ When the bellman gave notice five weeks later that the 'French Wear' was to be repaired, 'some hundreds of weavers and woolcombers', with 'the women going on in the front', marched through the town to 'the beating of a frying pan' and vowed they would drown all those who

¹ *Gent's. Mag.*, 1753, p. 246.

³ *S.P.*, 36, 122.

⁵ *Gent's. Mag.*, 1753, p. 343.

² *S.P.*, 36, 122. *Gent's. Mag.*, 1753, p. 247.

⁴ *S.P.*, 36, 122. *Gent's. Mag.*, 1753, p. 343.

were engaged on the work of repair. Finding the alarm to be a false one, they went to Mr. Birchell's and 'swore if the Wear was repair'd, or attempted to be repaired, they would pull down the mills and his house'.¹

After nearly three years of comparative tranquillity, disorders broke out again in the year 1756. On August 25 Lord Holderness was informed that 'a great number of colliers and other persons . . . with Stakes, Hatches, Pixaxes' had entered the town of Nottingham and were 'shouting and making a great noise'. After releasing some of their comrades who had been imprisoned, they were about to leave the town when some womenfolk advised them to return. Before they finally left, one mill was destroyed and others damaged. Further trouble ensued as the Mayor, with the support of the military, went to the homes of the rioters and arrested some of them in bed.²

The Mayor of Coventry was more discreet than the Mayor of Nottingham. Having been awakened from sleep by the report that 'three hundred Colliers' had come into the town 'in a riotous and threatening disposition', he was able to send them home again on the promise that 'their grounds for Complaints against Farmers, Bakers, etc. should be removed'.³ It was otherwise at a place between Walsall and Wednesbury, where a dressing mill was badly damaged.⁴ Another report, perhaps referring to the same affair, tells of a crowd of five hundred people which assembled at Werrybridge near Walsall, and 'pulled to the Ground a large Corn Mill, alleging that the owner is a great Engrosser of Corn'.⁵ The results were more disastrous when 'a mill was attacked between Lichfield and Rudgley'. Two persons going to the assistance of the miller were accidentally shot by the defenders, one being killed on the spot and the other seriously wounded.⁶

Resentment against the Quakers characterized the riots in the vicinity of Nuneaton. Believing that these people were responsible for the rise in the price of provisions, the rioters attacked their homes and meeting houses at Atherstone, Hartshill, and Nuneaton. Farms and corn mills were also damaged at Polesworth and Tamworth.⁷

Because some farmers had asked 'a most extravagant Price for Corn', a three days' riot began at Sheffield on Tuesday,

¹ *Gent's. Mag.*, 1753, p. 390.

² *S.P.*, 36, 135.

³ *Ibid.*, 36, 135.

⁴ *Gent's. Mag.*, 1756, p. 409.

⁵ *Bath Advertiser*, August 28, 1756.

⁶ *Public Advertiser*, August 26, 1756.

⁷ *S.P.*, 36, 135. *Gent's. Mag.*, 1756, p. 409. *Public Advertiser*, August 29, 1756.

August 24. Enraged with anger at this selfish action, a number of rioters 'broke into one of the Storehouses and gave large quantities to the populace'. The merchants retaliated and a fierce struggle ensued. But not until there came into the fray some groups of 'stout men, all armed with Bludgeons, each Party with a Gentleman for their Captain', were the rioters dispersed.¹

Once again the miners of the West Midlands showed their resentment against the high price of goods; on Monday, August 30, some of them inflicted 'considerable damage to the Owners of Sundry Mills' at Wirksworth and 'Places contiguous'.² A month later some weavers in the neighbourhood of Stroud, distressed and angered at 'the Badness of Trade and Dearthness of Provisions', attacked their masters instead of negotiating with them.³

Beginning with Monday, November 8, a five days' riot broke out in the vicinity of Wellington, Shropshire, because of 'the excessive price of corn'. On successive days 'a large number of Colliers, joined by a few watermen and other labourers', went into the markets of Much Wenlock, Shiftnall, Broseley, and Wellington and obliged the sellers of grain and other commodities to reduce their prices. All who refused had their goods commandeered. 'The houses of many Grocers, Bakers and Farmers' were broken into and their persons as well as their property roughly handled. 'The Gentry had little regard paid them, the Middle Sort of People less, and the Poor were stript of everything.' After the gentry had enlisted about two thousand five hundred servants, tenants, townspeople, and neighbours, 'all pretty well armed', some of the rioters were arrested and the rest put to flight.⁴

About the same time, 'because of the excessive price of corn', 'the half starved' 'manufacturing people' of Kidderminster gathered together in a body 'and did great mischief to the farmers and dealers in grain'. 'At Ludlow the neighbouring colliers did the same.' So numerous were the rioters at Taunton that they succeeded in carrying away 'near 50 sacks of wheat and flower, which they sold'.⁵ Both men and women took part in a riot at Evesham; they prevented 'the Cornfactors appearing

¹ *Public Advertiser*, September 1, 1756.

² *Public Advertiser*, September 3, 1756. *Bath Advertiser*, September 11, 1756.

³ *Public Advertiser*, October 28, 1756. *Bath Advertiser*, October 30, 1756.

⁴ *S.P.*, 36, 136. *Public Advertiser*, November 11 and 18, 1756.

⁵ *Gent's Mag.*, 1756, p. 544. *Public Advertiser*, November 22, 1756.

in the market, or even in any of the streets the whole day'.¹ A corn vessel at Gloucester with two thousand bushels of wheat on board was seized 'by a mob of colliers from the Forest of Deane'. Assisted by some of the countrymen, they carried off most of their booty. At the same time 'some thousand bushels of wheat, flour, peas and barley' were commandeered by a crowd of miners near Ross, while a mill in the vicinity was also demolished.²

In the north-east of England 'several Riots' took place at Berwick and in north Durham. Although the mob succeeded in seizing a few 'Horseloads of Barley', most of it was taken from them by the magistrates.³

Increased disorders broke out in the year 1757. On Tuesday, April 5, 'about 200 Colliers assembled in a riotous manner and broke open a mealman's house at Frome'.⁴ About a month later 'a disturbance happened at Salisbury . . . on account of the high price of corn'. It originated with a party of women, but was soon quelled 'by the activity of the Mayor and city Officers'.⁵ Once again the women were prominent when, through 'the scarcity of corn', they committed outrages at Tharpston and Kidderminster.⁶ In Worcestershire the mills of Knightfordbridge were set on fire 'by evil minded persons'; at Fordingbridge in Hampshire the mills were invested 'by a large body of rioters, armed with axes, hooks and clubs'. They were not dispersed until they had extorted 'money to a considerable amount from the miller'.⁷ Once again the miners of Frome gave vent to their anger when 'they attacked several mills' in the neighbourhood. 'At Hereford a like insurrection happened in which two men and four women were dreadfully wounded'.⁸ On Tuesday, June 7, a mob of six thousand gathered at Manchester, 'overcame the civil powers, broke into the storehouses and destroyed or carry'd off grain, flour, and provisions to the value of 5 or 6000£'.⁹ About the same time 'a body of 500 people, men and women, assembled in the neighbourhood of Petworth and Arundel in Sussex, and seized all the grain they could find'.¹⁰ A week later 'the populace rose at Oxford, and in a few minutes seized and divided a waggon load of corn that was supposed to have been bought by sample'.

¹ *Public Advertiser*, November 22, 1756.

² *Gent's. Mag.*, 1756, p. 591.

³ *S.P.*, 36, 136.

⁴ *Gent's. Mag.*, 1757, p. 185.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

'At the King's Head they seized two loads more', and from the wharf they 'carried off 15 loads, the property of different dealers'. They continued their looting the next day, when they broke into 'other storehouses on the wharf, and carried off considerable booty'.¹ On Wednesday, June 15, 'a mob (chiefly of Women) assembled at Cambridge, broke open a storehouse in which were lodging about 15 quarters of wheat, the property of a farmer, who had that day refused 9s. 6d. a bushel for it, and carry'd it all off. They assembled again the next day and carried off 27 sacks of flour that were lodged at Small-bridges'.² A few days later 'a numerous mob rose at Ely and seized and carried away 200 coom of wheat'.³

A similar disturbance occurred about this time at Dilham in Norfolk, and twenty of the rioters were committed to gaol.⁴ In due time the infection of disorder reached the city of York. During the month of September several riots broke out because of 'ye high price of corn'. Houses were forcibly entered and much furniture destroyed.⁵ 'A very numerous body of farmers and country people, out of 40 townships in the weapon of Buckrose', East Riding, 'armed with scythes and clubs, rose on account of the Militia Act'. While confessing their willingness to serve their King and country, they stoutly declared they would not 'submit to the Act as it stood'.⁶ For the same reason 'great outrages were committed by the populace at Boston', while at Mansfield the magistrates were rudely assaulted in seeking to administer the Act. Further disturbances broke out in the villages round Boston, and though the Mayor had promise of military help to quell the disorder, he was not sure he could use it outside the town.⁷ Toward the end of November a number of people, mostly colliers, rose in the neighbourhood of Liverpool, and 'committed some outrages upon the millers and corn jobbers'. 'They obliged the farmers to sell their wheat at Prescott Market at 5s. 6d. per bushel, and other grain in Proportion'.⁸ Partly on this account, 'some of the principal inhabitants' armed themselves and began to patrol the streets. Seeking to justify their conduct, they informed the State Secretary that 'the fresh riots committed at Manchester' and 'threatened against Liverpool . . . call aloud for some method of preventing them'.⁹

¹ *Gent's Mag.*, 1757, p. 286.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 430.

⁵ *S.P.*, 36, 138.

⁶ *Gent's. Mag.*, 1757, p. 431.

⁷ *S.P.*, 36, 138.

⁸ *Gent's. Mag.*, 1757, p. 529.

⁹ *S.P.*, 36, 138.

Though food riots had ceased by 1758, there were signs of discontent against enclosures and wage conditions. On Monday, June 5, 'a large mob of weavers, labourers, and other disorderly persons assembled at Shaw-Hill in Wilts, and . . . cut down . . . the banks and fences of the gardens and orchards in that neighbourhood, under pretence that they were purloined from the common'.¹ A report from Norwich on Tuesday, August 1, tells of some labourers 'headed by farmers' who had 'pulled down a bridge . . . being built near that town'.² While the Assizes were being held at Lancaster during the August of 1758, news was brought to the presiding judge about some 'prodigious riots and tumults in and about Manchester' with the object of raising wages. The judge accordingly had some appropriate words to say on the matter.³

In the decade 1760 to 1770, apart from the year 1766, only a few scattered disturbances took place. The one reported from Hexham on Monday, March 9, 1761, was undoubtedly the most serious. Through energetic action, the men of Durham had successfully demonstrated against the application of the Militia Act in their area by marching into Gateshead. 'Armed with clubs', they went to the magistrates and told them that 'they who have lands should hire men to maintain them'. By this display of force, they extracted from them the promise that 'the Gentlemen in the County would find men to fill up the vacancies'.⁴ Seeking to imitate the Durham example, a Northumberland mob went to Morpeth and Whittingham and compelled the Deputy Lieutenant and magistrates to abandon their endeavours to operate the Act. Encouraged by this success, a mob of five thousand marched into Hexham to attempt the same task. The Yorkshire militia, however, was waiting for them and immediately fired into their ranks. As a result of that encounter, 'such a scene of bloodshed' had not been witnessed for years. More than a hundred of the marchers were killed and wounded.⁵

Through the discretion of the military, a similar disaster was prevented at Witney. 'Armed with bludgeons and pitchforks', a desperate mob went to North Leigh Heath with the avowed intention of destroying all the fences erected by the recent enclosure. Although possessing 'a vast number of bludgeons',

¹ *Gent's. Mag.*, 1758, p. 286.

² *Ibid.*, p. 391.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 392.

⁴ *London Chronicle*, March 5, 1761.

⁵ *Ibid.*, March 14, 1761. *Gent's. Mag.*, 1761, p. 138.

they were repelled on two successive days by the soldiers, who refrained from using their firearms.¹

Another kind of disturbance was witnessed in Lancashire in the summer of 1762. With the object of destroying 'the houses, ware houses, stock in trade and household goods of divers persons', 'a great number of disorderly persons from . . . Oldham, Saddleworth, Ashton, and other places adjacent' went on July 10 into Manchester. Being thwarted in their purpose by the diligence of the magistrates, they threatened to destroy the property of Bradshaw, Bayley and Lloyd.² Later in the year an attempt to establish a minimum wage of forty shillings a month was made by the seamen of Liverpool. In the disturbance that ensued, three of the sailors were arrested. But while on their way to Lancaster Gaol they were released at Ormskirk by a sympathetic crowd.³

Nine months later, 'several thousand journeymen weavers assembled in Spitalfields, and, in a riotous and violent manner, broke open the house of one of their masters, destroyed his looms, and cut a great quantity of rich silk to pieces'. Not satisfied with this destruction, they made an effigy of their employer, placed it in a cart, 'with a halter about its neck, an executioner on one side, and a coffin on the other, and after drawing it thro' several streets they hanged it on a jibbet, and burnt it to ashes'.⁴

Evidence of the rising discontent was also seen at Devizes at the beginning of January, 1765. 'Armed and Disguised', a tumultuous mob 'assaulted the houses of several of the principal inhabitants, particularly the Mayor's and Town Clerk's, the distributor of the stamps, the post master's, tatlers, and the excise office, with divers others, and demolished the windows, destroying the furniture, and threatened the lives of the occupiers'.⁵

In the July of that year, 'a number of people at West Haddon in Northamptonshire . . . formed themselves into a tumultuous mob, and pulled up the fence of a new enclosure there'.⁶ On Thursday, August 1, 'a mob of four or five hundred men and women assembled at Wickham Market' in Suffolk and prevented some gentlemen from applying the Act 'for erecting a Workhouse . . . in the Hundreds of Loes and Wilford'. They

¹ *London Chronicle*, March 28, 1761.

² *Ibid.*, July 15, September 11, 1762.

³ *Ibid.*, December 4. *Gent's. Mag.*, 1762, p. 596.

⁴ *Gent's. Mag.*, 1763, p. 514.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1765, p. 94.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 389.

broke into the room, destroyed the books, and chased the gentlemen out of the place.¹ Greater damage was done at Bulcamp a few days later. In the course of one day the whole of the workhouse was demolished, with the forge and the smith's shop. Encouraged by this achievement, the mob went to the houses of Sir John Rous, Rev. Mr. Buxton of Darsham, and John Shrivener's of Sibston, where they demanded food and beer. Going on to Yoxford, they began to destroy the house of Mr. Ingham, but were persuaded to retire before doing much damage.² In the afternoon of the same day another body of rioters went to Nacton Heath for the purpose of pulling down the workhouse recently erected there. When the military arrived, the mob 'fell upon both horses and men, with such arms as they had, pease-makers, hedge-flakers, cudgels, etc.' But in five minutes the rioters were dispersed, some of whom were wounded, while seven were arrested.³

Before the end of 1765, the growing discontent expressed itself in other places. A number of people from Banbury, resenting the enclosure recently completed by Mr. Eyre at Walkworth, began to destroy the fences, rails, and ditches newly made there. Before they were able to finish their work of destruction, a number of gentlemen rushed upon them with their horses at full gallop.⁴ Some miners in the North of England, seeking to express their dissatisfaction with the action of Sir Ralf Milbanke in opening his pits while the men were on strike, began to destroy the equipment by cutting the ropes and throwing the machinery down the shafts. Not satisfied with this form of destruction, they threatened to set his pits on fire unless he altered his conduct.⁵

Greater disturbances occurred in the year 1766 than at any other period in the course of the eighteenth century. The first signs of the rising storm were manifest at Honiton; the poor folk there seized some 'bags of corn lodged by the farmers in the public houses . . . and sold the corn at 5s. 6d. per bushel, paying the money and returning the bags to the owners'. 'Several thousands more rose and pulled down the bunting mills at Ottery, Tipton and Sidbury.' The damage inflicted amounted to more than £1,000. Because of the high price of provisions, 'great disturbances amongst the poor' occurred near

¹ *Lloyd's Evening Post*, September 20, 1765.

² *Ibid.*, August 12, September 20, 1765.

³ *Ibid.*, August 12. *S.P.*, 37, 4. *London Chronicle*, August 10, 1765.

⁴ *London Chronicle*, September 10, 1765.

⁵ *Ibid.*, September 17, 1765.

Exeter. Several flour mills at Exeter and Stoke were destroyed. Similar disorders took place at Crediton for the same reason.¹ At Newbury in Berkshire 'a great number of poor people' went to the market-place, 'ripped open the sacks, and scattered all the corn about'. Not satisfied with this outrage, they 'took butter, meat, cheese and bacon out of the shops and threw it into the streets'. After compelling the bakers to sell their bread cheaper, they went to the mills and cast the flour into the river.² From Newbury they proceeded to Shaw Mill, where they broke the windows of the house and threw the flour into the water. At other mills they continued their work of destruction. Greater damage was done at Exeter, Cullompton, Bradnick, Tiverton, and Silferton; a number of mills were destroyed, the farmers being compelled to sell their corn at 5s. a bushel.³

Throughout the whole of September, 1766, riots occurred in many places. At Exeter a large mob objected to the price of 9s. 6d. a bushel for wheat. According to one report, they 'broke open a cheese warehouse and sold the cheese much under value'.⁴ Because of the exorbitant prices at Stourbridge, the mob attacked the butter dealers, seized their commodities and threw them into the air. By their methods of violence, they apparently 'lowered the price of butter, meat and wheat'.⁵ After the price of butter had been fixed at Birmingham at 10d. a pound, the rioters came to the market and sold it at 7d. and gave all the money to the dealers.⁶ Although the weavers from Stroud were prevented from doing damage at Gloucester because most of the farmers reduced their wheat to 5s. a bushel, they, however, committed 'great outrages at Stroud, Minchin-Hampton, and that neighbourhood'. 'A huckster's shop was levelled to the ground after the occupier had killed one of the mob.'⁷ At another place a monopolizer had 'fifty fitches of bacon and upwards of a ton of cheese taken from him'. A farmer at Tetbury suffered a similar depredation. After selling his produce at a lower rate, the mob returned all the money to him.⁸ The rioters at Kidderminster, Stourbridge, and Bewdley

¹ *Gent's Mag.*, July 31, 1766, p. 386.

² *Gent's Mag.*, 1766, p. 388. *St. James's Chronicle*, August 9, 1766.

³ *Lloyd's Evening Post*, August 4-6, 13-15, 1766.

⁴ *Gent's Mag.*, 1766, p. 437. *Lloyd's Evening Post*, September 5-8, 22-4, 1766.

⁵ *Gent's Mag.*, 1766, p. 437. *Lloyd's Evening Post*, September 5-8, 1766.

⁶ *Lloyd's Evening Post*, September 10, 1766.

⁷ *Gent's Mag.*, 1766, p. 437. *Lloyd's Evening Post*, September 15-17, 19-22, 1766.

⁸ *Lloyd's Evening Post*, September 22-4, 1766.

adopted the same procedure. All the wheat and butter in the markets were sold at a lower price.¹ Not content with lowering the price of wheat from 8s. to 6s. 6d. a bushel, the populace at Salisbury went to the town mill and did considerable damage.² When the butter-dealers at the Worcester market refused to lower their prices from 9d. to 6d. a pound, their supplies were seized and sold at the lower price.³ More serious damage was done in the vicinity of Frome when the rioters attacked the Bradley and Beckington mills. According to one report, the miller was left for dead, while his servant was killed. According to another report, the miller killed a man and a boy, and in consequence the rioters were so exasperated 'that they set fire to the mills and burnt them to the ground'.⁴

Similar disturbances took place at Lechdale, Malmesbury, and Hampton. One dealer at Lechdale lost £200 worth of cheese when the mob broke into his warehouse. They also seized 'a waggon load of cheese designed for London, and Carry'd it all off'. At Malmesbury 'they seized all the corn, sold it at 5s. a bushel, and returned the farmers the moneys'. 'Some lives were lost' at Hampton, 'and houses pulled down'. 'All the cheese and bacon in the warehouses' at Tetbury 'were commandeered and sold at a lower price. At Bradley the rioters destroyed a mill and divided the corn found in it among them'.⁵ In Wiltshire 'the whole country' was said to be 'flocking to join the rioters'.⁶ Even the centre of learning did not escape the contagion of disorder. A mob at Oxford of more than two hundred went to the market-place and took away all the flour, afterwards dividing it among themselves. Then they went to the mills and compelled the owners to reduce the price of their grain. Regardless of the appeal of the Mayor and the Vice-Chancellor of the University, they made the dealers in candles, cheese, bacon, soap, and butter greatly reduce their prices.⁷ The riot at Norwich was described as an insurrection. 'Victuals of all kinds was thrown from one part to another.' One mill at least was destroyed, and 'the flour thrown sack after sack into

¹ *Lloyd's Evening Post*, September 22-4, 1766. *Gent's. Mag.*, 1766, p. 437.

² *Ibid.* *Lloyd's Evening Post*, September 22-4, 1766.

³ *Lloyd's Evening Post*, September 26-9, 1766.

⁴ *Lloyd's Evening Post*, September 26-9, 1766. *London Chronicle*, September 23-5, 1766. *Gent's. Mag.*, 1766, p. 437.

⁵ *London Chronicle*, September 25-7, 1766. *Gent's. Mag.*, 1766, pp. 436-7.

⁶ *Gent's. Mag.*, 1766, p. 437.

⁷ *London Chronicle*, September 25-7, 1766. *Gent's. Mag.*, 1766, p. 437.

the river'.¹ 'The proprietors' books of accounts, furniture, plate and money' were 'carried off or destroyed'. Bakers' shops were plundered and shattered. A large malt-house was set on fire. Houses and warehouses 'were pulled down'.² At Birmingham the mob tried to reduce the market prices, but were prevented from doing so by the peace officers. Attempting to do the same thing at Wolverhampton, they succeeded. At Bromsgrove they compelled the farmers to sell wheat 'at 5s. a bushel, and the butcher's meat at two pence halfpenny a pound'. At Halesowen they reduced the price of cheese to 2½d. a pound and flour to 5s. Before dispersing, they destroyed two dressing mills. At Coventry the rioters were joined by the colliers, who 'began by plundering the warehouses of cheese and selling the same at low prices'. As a result of their confiscation, 'many poor children had cheese for their suppers that had not tasted a bit for months past'.³ At Great Marlow on September 28 a number of bargemen 'began to be very mutinous and disorderly'. Going from shop to shop, they 'seized wheat, bread, butter, cheese, &c. they found in them and sold it at such prices as they were pleased to set it at'. Neighbouring farmers were visited and compelled to sell their wheat at 5s. a bushel. Going to Maidenhead, the rioters 'carried matters to a greater excess and behaved so tyrannically that in the evening the town people rose upon them'.⁴ At Leicester, every wagon passing through the streets was stopped by the mob and all the commodities found therein were sold at their own prices. When the Mayor, who was a baker, read the Riot Act, they threatened him with the destruction of his house and mills. After the mob at Nottingham had found some wheat and cheese on the wharf ready for transportation, they sold some of it at a low price and threw the rest into the river; they also took about 10 tons of cheese from the farmers; when a party of light horse appeared, they 'pelted them with stones very severely'. In the evening they went 'to the Mayor's house and broke his doors and windows'.⁵ Over one thousand rioters took part in the disturbances throughout Warwickshire. Dividing themselves into separate groups, they did 'incredible mischief'. Visiting the market-place at Great

¹ *London Chronicle*, September 30–October 2, 1766. *Lloyd's Evening Post*, September 29–October 1, October 3–6, 1766.

² *Ibid. Gent's Mag.*, 1766, p. 493.

³ *Lloyd's Evening Post*, September 29–October 1, October 1–3, 1766. *Gent's Mag.*, 1766, p. 493.

⁴ *Lloyd's Evening Post*, October 3–6, 6–8, 1766.

⁵ *Ibid.*, October 6–8, 1766.

Colton and Alcester, they caused more alarm than damage. Going to Kidderminster, the soldiers fired upon them 'and killed eight persons upon the spot'. A Birmingham gang, 'well armed', went to Stratford and stopped all the wagons on the route, taking from them what wheat they had, and sold it at a lower price.¹ At Beccles, Bungay, and other market towns in Suffolk a number of women threatened to commandeer all the commodities and sell them at their own price. But such measures were not necessary, as the dealers had already reduced their prices.²

On Thursday, October 9, a body of rioters were unexpectedly caught in a warehouse; thirty-four of them were arrested and taken pinioned to Derby. More than £900 worth of cheese was taken from a boat at Dunnington in Leicestershire, but none of the rioters was apprehended.

Riots took place at many other towns during the month of October. Cirencester, Nottingham, St. Albans, Tetbury, Scarborough, Pagenwell, Ipswich, Will Mills, Dudley, Market Burnham, Ashby-de-la-Zouch, and Aylesbury were among the places affected. 'Under Pretence of Distress from the high Price of Wheat and other Provisions', disturbances had broken out in Oxford. The Secretary of State therefore wrote to the Duke of Marlborough, who was the Lord Lieutenant of the county, and desired him to use his influence to quell the disorders.³

Although London escaped the fever of unrest in 1766 it was not so fortunate in the next two years. In the spring of 1768 coal-heavers and sailors at Wapping committed various outrages, while watermen of Greenwich, coal-porters of Tower Hill, with many weavers, labourers and journeymen tailors, paraded the streets and protested against the high prices and low wages.⁴ So great was the alarm created in the minds of the Government officials that a Proclamation was made by the King enjoining every magistrate to restrain all those disorderly persons who have 'assembled themselves together in a riotous and unlawful manner'.⁵

The violence became more outrageous in the following year;

¹ *Lloyd's Evening Post*, October 8-10, 1766.

² *Ibid.*, October 10-13, 1766.

³ *Ibid.*, October to November, 1766. *London Chronicle*, October to November, 1766. *St. James's Chronicle*; October 9-11, 11-14, 14-16, 16-18, 1766.

⁴ *Westminster Journal*, April 30, May 14, 1768.

⁵ *Lloyd's Evening Post*, May 11-13, 1768.

'the mob showed . . . many marks of their resentment by hissing, groaning, throwing dirt' at a party of merchants on their way to express their loyalty to the King. Some of the gentlemen had their carriages attacked by mud and stones. A few of them had to discontinue their journey and find shelter in coffee-shops and houses. Those who succeeded in reaching the Palace were followed by four horses (two of them black and two white) drawing a hearse. 'An audacious attempt was made to drive the hearse into the Court-Yard . . . and a great tumult ensued.' This affair produced a Proclamation next day having for its object 'The Suppressing of Riots, Tumults and Unlawful Assemblies'; the King expressed his determination to put down all unlawful proceedings.¹

Apart from the year 1772, disturbances were less numerous in the decade from 1770 to 1780. In the October of 1771 strong resentment was shown against enclosures in the neighbourhood of Swinehead, near Boston; a number of rioters 'filled up the ditches and broke down the rails of the new enclosure for many miles together'. Resentment was also shown against Mr. Farnel and Mr. Simpson, whose barns were set on fire; damage was caused to the extent of £1,500.²

The first outbreak of mob violence in 1772 began at Colchester, when, in the early part of April, several 'waggons loaded with wheat and flour' were seized by the populace. Although momentarily dispersed, they collected again and went to Manningtree, where they committed further outrages.³

Similar disturbances, though lasting longer, took place at Bury St. Edmunds. For at least four days great confusion and alarm existed in the town because gangs of ignorant men 'with rags for colours' paraded the streets day and night. They obliged 'the meal-men and shopkeepers to sell them their commodities at their own prices'. 'The Dealers in Butter and Cheese' were also visited by them and the price of their goods was fixed at $4\frac{1}{2}d.$ a pound for butter and $5d.$ a pound for cheese. Having no military in the town, 'all the Inhabitants' were 'under the most melancholy Apprehension of the Dangerous Consequences'. Even the farmers were afraid and dared not bring 'either Fowls, Butter or Eggs' to the market, 'and the Butchers were fearful . . . that if they killed any meat, it would be taken away'. Eventually the rioters were dispersed by the

¹ *London Chronicle*, March 21-3, 1769.

² *Westminster Journal*, November 2-9, 1771.

³ *S.P.*, 37, 9. *Daily Advertiser*, April 18, 1772.

vigorous action of a combined force of fifteen hundred tradesmen and inhabitants.¹

The town of Chelmsford was visited by another gang of rioters. On Sunday, April 12, they 'went down to Mr. Bullen, the Miller's, and seized a Cart Load of Flour that was going off to London, and made him take it back to the Market Cross, where they obliged him to sell it at 1s. 6d. a Peck'. After compelling other millers to do the same, 'they went to the Farmers . . . and likewise stopt several loads of wheat upon the Road, and brought them all up to the Cross, where they sold it out to the Millers at 9£ a load, upon condition that they should grind it, and sell out the Flour to the Poor at 1s. 6d. a Peck. They likewise stopped some Carts with Pork and Veal, that were going to the London Markets, and brought them back, and sold the Meat at 3d. per pound.'² Writing to Lord Rochford about the affair, The Rev. John Tindall, a local magistrate, describes the rioters as 'hourly committing great Outrages upon the Farmers and Millers' and causing 'great Depredations upon the Shopkeepers and others in this town'. While confessing his inability to stop these illegal proceedings, he managed, however, to prevent the seizure of the Militia fire-arms by locking them up.³

A rather humorous situation developed in connection with a riot at Ixworth. After extracting contributions from the country people, the mob entered the premises of a local miller and caused damage to his property amounting to £10. Not satisfied with this manifestation of their anger, they 'set him on a table and put him up for auction, after which they drove him through the town, beating him with sacks'.⁴

Before the end of April, 1772, the unrest had spread to Exeter. Reporting the situation, a correspondent described 'the Poor of St. Sydwell's' as 'very riotous', 'having seized a Quantity of Flour belonging to Mr. Williams', the cornfactor. Instead of sending it to Wellington, as he had purposed doing, they sold part of it 'for 1d. per lb., the remainder they divided and kept'.⁵

During that month trouble had developed at Redditch in Worcester because of the enclosure of waste ground. In the

¹ *Daily Advertiser*, April 18, 1772.

² *Ibid.*, April 21, 1772. *London Evening Post*, April 11-14, 14-16, 1772. *Westminster Journal*, April 11-18, 1772.

³ *S.P.*, 37, 9.

⁴ *London Evening Post*, April 25-8, 1772.

⁵ *Daily Advertiser*, April 28, 1772.

usual way, some of the rioters were arrested, four of them being committed to gaol.¹

Food riots were also reported from several places in the south-west. At Ilminster the rioters 'seized a waggon and 60 firkins of butter, carried it to the Market House and divided it among themselves, without paying anything for it'. At another place they commandeered thirty firkins of butter and, going to Farmer Hockley's, they 'obliged him to give them a hogshead of cider, and promised . . . not to enter his house nor take his butter'. Visiting several dairies, they 'did considerable damage to everyone by seizing butter, cheese, drink, victuals and all they could lay hands on'. At Crewkerne and Chard 'tis nearly the same, only they were once repelled by the farmers and many wounded'.² In the vicinity of Taunton, they 'obliged the farmers to sell their wheat to them at their own stipulated price, which was 5s. a bushel, Winchester measure, otherwise they threatened to take it by force'.³

Discontent was not so widespread in the year 1773, though disorders were reported from Bedfordshire and Lincolnshire. In the last week of July 'the poor of Bedfordshire assembled in great numbers at the several markets of Newport Pagnell, Woburn, Fenny Stratford, Stoney Stratford, and Leighton Buzzard, and cut the sacks of wheat, letting it into the street, and declaring it should not be sent to London'. A few days later intelligence from Lynn spoke of 'great riots in that town, on account of the dearness of bread and other provisions'. Eventually 'seven of the ringleaders were taken into custody and confined in that gaol'.⁴

In the summer of 1775 an industrial dispute was reported from Keighley. Between eight and nine hundred weavers 'paraded the town several days, and would suffer none to work at the usual prices'. Those who would not immediately join them had their 'pieces destroyed'.⁵ Another industrial dispute occurred in Cornwall; some of the tinnerns at Redruth, in the spring of 1776, objected to the introduction of the Staffordshire earthenware into the county. They broke all the wares they could meet with, then they went to Falmouth 'and began the same work'.⁶

¹ *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, April 30, 1772.

² *London Evening Post*, June 11-13, 1772.

³ *Ibid.*, June 20-3, 1772.

⁴ *Lloyd's Evening Post*, August 6-9, September 10-13, 1773.

⁵ *York Courant*, June 20, 1775. *London Evening Post*, June 15-17, 1775.

⁶ *London Evening Post*, April 6-9, 1776.

Norfolk became the scene of great disorder in the early months of 1778. According to one report, 'the Tumult was so great' in Norwich 'that all the People . . . were forced to shut up their Houses, and no business whatever could be transacted'. Another report designated it as 'a very serious affair'.¹

Once again the enforcement of the Militia Act caused a great deal of dissatisfaction, which in some places led to disorder. At Henfield in Sussex on May 29, 1778, while the magistrates were preparing a list of those to be called up for service, 'a mob assembled from all parts of the country, burst into the room, and would not suffer the business to go on'. A similar experience befell the magistrates at Petworth.²

Industrial disputes broke out in the following year, and were mostly confined to Nottinghamshire and Lancashire. 'The poor manufacturers' of Nottingham wreaked their vengeance on the property of their masters, and caused much damage 'to the amount of several thousand pounds'.³ Later in the year a numerous mob at Chorley completely destroyed the engines for carding and spinning that belonged to Mr. Arkwright, the damage amounting to more than £4,000. Similar destruction was meted out to the cotton works at Blackburn; a mill at Bolton suffered the same fate.⁴

Apart from the year 1780, very few disturbances occurred in the decade from 1780 to 1790. While the concessions granted by Parliament to the Roman Catholics in 1779 were mainly responsible for the Gordon Riots of 1780, and, in consequence, many of the Roman Catholic buildings were attacked by the mob, damage was also done to the homes of well-known judges and the gaols of the City. Most of the London prisons were damaged or set on fire. The gates of Blackfriars Gaol were thrown open and the toll-houses destroyed. Justice Willes was thrown into the mud. Lord Mansfield had his house damaged to the extent of £30,000; the homes of Justice Wilmot at Bethnal Green and Justice Hyde of Islington were completely demolished. Sir John Fielding did not escape the fury of the mob, his house being entirely destroyed.⁵

¹ *Public Advertiser*, March 13, 1778. *London Evening Post*, March 7-10, 1778.

² *S.P.*, 37, 12.

³ *S.P.*, 37, 13. *Leeds Intelligencer*, June 22, 1779. *London Evening Post*, June 12-15, 1779.

⁴ *Leeds Intelligencer*, October 12, 1779. *York Courant*, October 12, 1779. *London Evening Post*, October 9-12, 12-14, 1779.

⁵ *S.P.*, 37, 14. *London Evening Post*, June 1-3, 3-6, 6-8, 1780. *Leeds Intelligencer*, June 6, 13, 1780.

A similar resentment against the Roman Catholics was shown in the city of Bath. In the disorders that occurred, described by Lord Hillsborough as 'the Seditious proceedings of a violent and outrageous mob', several houses and a chapel belonging to the Roman Catholics were pulled down.¹

Quietude reigned everywhere in the land in the course of the next two years, but signs of the growing discontent were revealed at Wolverhampton in the October of 1782. Writing on the 16, Sir John Wrottesley informed the Home Office that 'a tumultuous mob', because of the high price of provisions, had tried to create a disturbance in the town. The threatened mischief, however, was avoided by the action of the bakers, who reduced their prices to the level demanded by the mob.²

Discontent became more outrageous in 1783. On March 10 a disturbance broke out at Etruria in Staffordshire, and a fortnight later one of the rioters was sentenced to death. When announcing the sentence, the noble Judge described 'the nature of the offence and declared the law with respect to riots in a most clear and positive manner'. He reminded his audience 'that all persons, to the number of twelve or more, who remain in a tumultuous manner, after proclamation has been made for the space of one hour, subject themselves to an indictment for capital felony'.³ Four weeks later 'a most daring Riot' was committed at Ludlow by 'a Body of Clee Hill Colliers', and although no details were published concerning the damage, the 'Gentlemen and Inhabitants of Salop' adopted suitable measures to defend themselves against further disorders.⁴ About the same time, a number of sailors in London, dissatisfied with their low wages, decided to visit the King for the purpose of acquainting him with their distresses. They were dissuaded from carrying out this risky project by the assurance of the local magistrates that their grievances would be investigated.⁵

A more serious affair occurred at Halifax on June 7: 'a numerous body of Rioters of both sexes assembled themselves on the different roads leading into the town, and compelled the drivers of Carriages loaded with corn to sell the same at a considerable price under the market'. Two days later 'another very large body of Rioters came to Bradford, took Corn and Meal from out of the Mills and other places which they sold at a low price, carried away or destroyed',

¹ S.P., 37, 21. ² H.O., 42, 1. H.O. is an abbreviation for *Home Office Papers*.

³ *Leeds Intelligencer*, March 25, 1783.

⁴ H.O., 42, 2.

⁵ *Ibid*.

vowing to return in a few days to burn the malt-houses and the mills. On Tuesday, June 10, the rioters at Huddersfield 'broke into some Corn Warehouses, took out the Corn and sold it at an inferior Price, and some of it they stole away'. Attempts to commandeer provisions by some rioters from Somerby, Soyland, Errington, and Rushworth on their way to Rochdale were prevented by the diligence of the magistrates and local gentlemen.¹

Several persons were wounded at Nottingham on Tuesday, July 1, as a crowd of stocking makers demonstrated against Mr. Fellows, the Mayor and leading hosier of the town. Trade being very low, he 'took this opportunity to lower the poor men's wages', threatening that 'if they did not comply . . . their Frames should stand still'. Annoyed at this harsh treatment, they 'assembled in a large body, made an Effigy by Way of Ridicule against the first Magistrate, and placed it on the Back of an Ass, carrying it through the principal Streets of the Town; at length they came to the Mayor's House, where they tied it to the Knocker of his Door and scourged it for a considerable Time. Then they broke his windows and did some other damage.' The family defended themselves by 'firing upon the Rioters very smartly'. Some of the mob were wounded in the conflict, but they were not dispersed until the military appeared.² Coming again next day, they were driven off once more by the soldiers. From there 'they went to divers other Hosiers, where they committed the like Depredations'. Peace was not restored until another regiment came into the town and all householders were sworn in as constables.³

Throughout the whole of 1783 discontent against high prices of provisions continuously prevailed among the miners of Staffordshire, and although they repeatedly showed a disposition to riot, they were on every occasion restrained by the presence of the military.⁴

For the next few years disturbances were rare. This may have been due to the very severe sentences inflicted for trivial offences, when hundreds of uneducated people were put to death or transported across the seas. Be that as it may, the fact is that for the next seven years there was an absence of serious riots. Only in one case was there any danger of a serious disturbance.

¹ *H.O.*, 42, 2. *Leeds Intelligencer*, June 17, 1783. *Public Advertiser*, June 21, 1783.

² *Public Advertiser*, July 5, 1783.

³ *Ibid.*, July 7, 1783. *Leeds Intelligencer*, July 8, 1783.

⁴ *H.O.*, 42, 3.

In the early June of 1785 the magistrates and merchants of Sunderland were rather perturbed concerning 'the turbulent spirit of the Seamen, Keelmen and Labourers', because they were 'demanding exorbitant wages, threatening and doing much mischief'. Once again the soldiers saved the situation, for with their appearance the rioters immediately dispersed.¹

The last ten years of the century can be regarded in many ways as the most critical. Inspired by the example of the French Revolution, the disposition to create disorder became increasingly threatening. Toward the end of October, 1790, a three days' disturbance occurred in Nottingham; the framework knitters, not content with the prices allotted to them, 'paraded the streets in the most dangerous manner'. According to one report, they 'proceeded to such acts of violence that the military were under the necessity of firing upon them, by which many were wounded, and upwards of forty of the rioters were seized and sent to prison'.²

A more serious affair took place in Birmingham on Thursday, July 13, 1791, and the five following days. In the afternoon of Thursday, July 13, a supposedly patriotic mob, claiming to represent both Church and King, manifested their pretended loyalty by attacking the hotel where some friends of the French Revolution had been holding a meeting. After breaking the windows of the building, they marched to Dr. Priestly's chapel and home, completely destroying both of them. Similar destruction was wrought at Hagley, Kingswood and Halesowen. Not until they had done damage to the extent of £400,000 were they dispersed by the military.³

In the course of the same month 'the lower class of the people at Sheffield discovered an inclination to riot in consequence of the inclosure of the commons at Stanington and Hallam'. Although the soldiers were ordered to disperse them, the task was not accomplished until the rioters had 'set fire to several rickets of hay' and 'gutted the houses of the Rev. Mr. Wilkinson and Mr. Eyre'.⁴

During the first week in May, 1792, an attempt to destroy some machinery was made in the neighbourhood of Woodchester, near Gloucester. According to one report, 'a considerable

¹ H.O., 42, 6.

² *Gent's Mag.*, 1790, p. 1045. *York Courant*, November 2, 1790

³ *Leeds Intelligencer*, July 26, 1791. *York Courant*, July 26, 1791. *Gent's Mag.*, 1791, pp. 675-6.

⁴ *Leeds Intelligencer*, August 2, 1791.

number of the most idle people employed in the clothing manufacture' assembled 'in a most riotous manner, with a view to destroying some machines erected in the neighbourhood for the purpose of scrubbing wool'. Owing to faintheartedness, their hazardous project was not accomplished.¹

Once again the town of Nottingham became the scene of unseemly disorder. On Saturday, May 12, 1792, 'a great number of Persons assembled and destroyed a large Quantity of Butcher's meat, alleging . . . that the price was too high'. After a noisy demonstration, they entered 'the shambles', cleared out all the meat, and broke 'the doors, shutters and fire places'. They were not dispersed until the arrival of the military. The soldiers were called into action again on the following Tuesday; they fired with ball and charged with drawn sabres a number of journeymen shoemakers who were demanding an increase in wages.²

Before the end of May the contagion of disorder had reached the town of Leicester. 'Under a pretext of being aggrieved by the high price of provisions' 'a number of disorderly persons', on Saturday, May 19, 'assembled together . . . and . . . committed some acts of violence by breaking the windows of those individuals whom they had marked as objects of their resentment'. By the co-operation of the Militia and the local constables, they were ultimately put to flight.³

Tendencies to riot were also revealed at Norwich, Sheffield, and Northampton, but, because of the diligence of the magistrates, no actual disturbance took place.⁴ Riots, however, broke out at other places towards the end of the year. A large number of colliers at Leeds, supported by a crowd of women and boys, 'assembled on Rothwell Haigh, shouting, blowing horns, threatening and obstructing those who were then quietly working in and about the pits'. Although warrants were issued against the ringleaders, 'a resolute mob immediately got together and prevented the Constable and other Assistants from apprehending them'.⁵ Because of 'the dearness of provisions', a riot took place at Yarmouth; the Mayor, seeking to quell the disturbance, was attacked by one of the crowd. Happily, a blow which might have killed him was warded off

¹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, May 14, 1792.

² *York Courant*, May 22, 1792. *Gent's. Mag.*, 1792, p. 471.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 472.

⁴ *York Courant*, June 4, 1792.

⁵ *Leeds Intelligencer*, October 22, 1792.

'by the spirited interference of Mr. J. Young, a Capt. of the Walsingham East Indiamen'.¹ Both Ipswich and Shields were the scene of labour troubles when the sailors, dissatisfied with their earnings, adopted violent means to improve their lot.²

Among the places affected by disorder in the year 1793, Liverpool, Cornwall, Sheffield, Nottingham, Birmingham, and Bristol were the most important. Early in February several towns in Cornwall had been visited by large bodies of miners 'in search of concealed corn', which they believed was intended for export. 'At Wadebridge they found about 2,500 bushels in store which they obliged the owners to sell at reduced prices. At Looe upwards of 6,000 bushels of grain were stopped by them from being shipped.'³ At Falmouth a few months later several thousand tanners, because of the quantity of corn and flour that were being sent abroad, created an unseemly disturbance. Declaring 'they could get none from the farmers', they demanded the corn at 16s. a sack. Showing a very menacing attitude, they compelled the Mayor to yield to their demands.⁴ A new ally came to the help of the distressed workers when the soldiers at Liverpool 'seized a great Quantity of Butter of the Farmers, for which they would pay no more than 6d. per Pound'.⁵ The very high price of provisions was described as the chief cause of 'a serious disturbance . . . in the Butter market at Sheffield'. Some of the vendors were driven out of the place and their butter was 'trodden under foot because they asked fifteen pence a pound for it'.⁶ A wage dispute at Dudley might have created an ugly situation, but the appearance of the military prevented the threatened disaster. The conflict at Nottingham proved to be a more serious affair, one of the disaffected being killed; several others were wounded in a battle with the so-called loyalists.⁷ More disastrous still was the disturbance at Bristol in the evening of September 30. Resenting the demand for toll at the bridge near the centre of the city, a number of angry people tried to force the gates. When the soldiers arrived, they were greeted with oysters and stones. Being in no hurry to disperse, the mob were fired upon and many of their number were either killed or wounded.¹ Another

¹ *Gent's. Mag.*, 1792, p. 1,049.

² *York Courant*, November 26, 1792. *Gent's. Mag.*, 1792, p. 1,049.

³ *Ibid.*, 1793, p. 179.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1793, p. 475.

⁵ *York Courant*, June 17, 1793.

⁶ *Ibid.*, June 24.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Leeds Intelligencer*, October 7, 1793. *York Courant*, October 7, 1793. *Gent's. Mag.*, 1793, p. 951.

disturbance was created in Birmingham in October, 1793, because a tax had been imposed upon the poorer classes to pay for the damage caused by the riots of 1791. After some of their comrades had been cast into prison, a strenuous endeavour was made to release them. In the encounter that ensued several of the attackers were severely wounded.¹ In a labour dispute among the river-bank workers at Grantham, some of the ring-leaders were cast into gaol. Being very angry at this treatment, many of the rank and file, 'armed . . . with plank hooks, spades, bludgeons, &c. . . . assembled before the Town Hall threatening destruction to the building, and everyone in it, unless their fellow workmen were immediately released'. 'The Magistrates thought it most prudent, for the safety of the place and their lives, to release the two men, who were taken away in triumph by the bankers.'²

While no widespread disturbance broke out in the year 1794, reports of minor disorders came from Nottingham and Newcastle. At the former place the conflict between the loyalists and the disaffected started again. As a result, several of the latter were injured.³ The affair at Newcastle was due to the keelmen being dissatisfied with their meagre wages.⁴ Throughout the whole of this year, a continual ferment existed in the West Riding of Yorkshire. In order to cope with any possible disorder, a defence corps was organized at Leeds, Halifax, Bradford, and York.⁵

The year 1795 can be regarded as the most turbulent during the last twenty years of the century. Riots broke out in various parts of the country. On Sunday, April 11, the inhabitants of Portsea were put 'into the greatest fears and apprehensions' because a crowd of four or five hundred people went to the butchers and bakers and demanded meat of all descriptions 'at 4*d.* per lb., and bread at 6*d.* per quartern loaf. Those that complied with those demands were paid with exactness at the above prices; but those who refused had their shops gutted without receiving any more money than the mob chose to leave. The soldiers in garrison, having in the morning demanded and obtained beef and mutton at 4*d.* per lb., could not be sent to quell a mob who evinced a similar resolution.'¹ Disturbances at Plymouth were described as the result of 'the nefarious

¹ *York Courant*, October 28, 1793.

³ *York Courant*, July 7, 1794.

⁵ *Ibid.*, May 26, 1794.

² *Gent's Mag.*, 1793, p. 1,209.

⁴ *Ibid.*, July 28.

⁶ *Gent's. Mag.*, 1795, p. 343.

practices of the Forestallers'.¹ At Stockton 'a number of riotous people went into the market and forcibly seized upon the poultry, butter, eggs and other articles, which they wantonly destroyed'.² In May the disorders spread to Darlington, Durham, and Newcastle. The situation looked more ominous at Southsea; four to six hundred of the Oxford Militia 'with musquets loaded and bayonets fixed . . . seized from the butchers all the mutton and beef they could find' and 'conveyed it to the church-yard, where they sold it at 4*d.* per pound'. Going to a corn-mill at Newhaven, they commandeered two thousand sacks of flour and retailed it at their own price.³ Once again the city of Oxford becomes the scene of 'considerable tumults . . . in consequence of the great scarcity of corn'.⁴ From the Midlands came reports of riots at Nottingham, Coventry, Nuneaton, Bedworth, and Hinckley. At Rochdale the riot resulted in the loss of human life. A similar disaster occurred at Sheffield when the local volunteers, desiring the mob to disperse, 'killed two persons on the spot'.⁵ 'Great dissatisfaction and an inclination for tumult' appeared at Hull because the price of flour was advanced from 2*s.* to 3*s.* a stone. 'Headed by a few women and boys', the mob 'proceeded round the town and wantonly broke the windows of several houses'.⁶ At Knottingley near Ferrybridge 'a vessel loaded with corn' was detained for a while and was not released until the Yeomanry came. Another vessel, 'laden with corn, going up the river to Wakefield', was held in custody at Castleford throughout the whole of one night.⁷ 'A number of people, principally women, assembled in a very riotous manner at the corn mills in Halifax' because the proprietors, it was said, 'had not only raised the price of their corn, but had endeavoured to persuade another dealer to do the same'. Once again the Yorkshire Volunteers were given an opportunity to demonstrate their loyalty and self-interest, and very soon after their appearance the rioters dispersed.⁸ When a party of cavalry wanted to escort a quantity of corn from a village near Leicester, 'the people in the village at first absolutely refused to suffer it to depart; but on the

¹ *York Courant*, April 12, 1795.

² *Newcastle Chronicle*, April 25, 1795.

³ *York Courant*, April 26, 1795. *Gent's Mag.*, 1795, p. 343.

⁴ *Leeds Intelligencer*, August 3, 1795.

⁵ *York Courant*, August 10, 1795.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Leeds Intelligencer*, August 10, 1795.

⁸ *Ibid.*, August 24. *York Courant*, August 24, 1795.

officer remonstrating with them and promising to give them eight quarters, which he actually did, they gave him three huzzas; yet no sooner had they set off but many of the mob began pelting the cavalry with bricks and stones, and one man had the audacity to discharge a gun at them.' After this assault, the soldiers turned upon the rioters, four of whom were killed, eight of them being wounded.¹ A more dangerous affair occurred in London toward the end of October. As the King was returning to Buckingham House from the Palace an angry mob rushed at the Royal carriage and broke the windows. In the confusion that ensued the horses took fright and one of the coachmen, being knocked down, had his thighs broken. Happily for the nation, the King suffered no personal injury.² On Sunday, November 2, a number of Clee Hill colliers were on their way to Ludlow 'for the purpose of destroying the mill and imposing their own laws upon the market' when they were met by the military. In the scuffle that followed several of the miners were wounded and the rest dispersed.³

Although disturbances in 1796 were not so numerous as in 1795, Cornwall, Yorkshire, and Nottinghamshire had further trouble. Early in April more than three thousand tanners near Truro 'committed some acts of violence'. When the Sheriff tried to disperse them they rudely insulted him. What he was unable to do six companies of the Worcester Militia succeeded in doing. 'Amidst showers of brickbats and stones', they advanced to the attack, and after making 'a brisk charge with fixed bayonets . . . put the insurgents to rout'.⁴ Because of 'an unexpected rise in the price of flour' 'several groups of rioters and disorderly people' assembled in the streets of Hull and on the last Monday in April attacked 'a miller against whom several reports had been propagated'. Not satisfied with attempts of personal violence, they 'proceeded to acts of greater outrage by attacking the premises of the miller and destroying the property in the mill, dwelling house, &c.' Coming together again 'with increased numbers and violence' on the following day, they attacked 'the dealers in butter, &c.', demanding from them all the commodities at a fixed price. Afraid of similar treatment, the shopkeepers immediately closed their shops, and even 'the farmers were terrified into a compliance with the

¹ *York Courant*, August 17, 1795.

² *Leeds Intelligencer*, November 2, 1795. *York Courant*, November 10, 1795.

³ *Gent's. Mag.*, 1795, p. 960.

⁴ *York Courant*, April 18, 1796.

demands of the mob'.¹ The disturbance at Nottingham was the outcome of a collision between the recruiting parties and the populace and 'several of both parties were severely wounded'.²

Outward tranquillity and underlying discontent were the outstanding features of the last three years of the century. Occasionally the discontent expressed itself in violent action. An example of that was provided by the Naval Mutiny in the June of 1797. Another example, though on a smaller scale, was given at Cross Flats, Beeston: 'a mill used for the raising of cloth . . . was pulled down and wholly destroyed'.³ Resentment against enclosure was shown at Gringly on the Hill, Nottingham, in the summer of 1798; a number of peasants were caught 'cutting down and destroying the fences directed to be made by the Commissioners'.⁴ Violent opposition to enclosure was also shown in the following summer at Wilbarston in Northampton. A mob of more than three hundred lighted a bonfire in the middle of the road to prevent the passing of the wagons. They likewise 'avowed their determination to resist the fencing out of a piece of land allotted to them in lieu of the common right', and after setting 'the civil power at defiance', they were finally dispersed by the Northampton Troop of Yeomanry.⁵ Once again the West Riding of Yorkshire became the scene of discontent and disorder. On Tuesday, November 19, 1799, 'a number of people, consisting principally of women', went to Huddersfield from the neighbouring villages and seized all the corn brought into the market. Before they left the town three of their number were arrested.⁶

With the close of the century the widespread unrest became more impatient and impassioned. Early in February, 1800, 'an inclination to disturb the peace' was manifest in many markets. In several places flour and meal were seized by riotous persons, 'generally women', and sold at greatly reduced prices.⁷ Similar scenes were witnessed during May, but through 'the spirited exertions of the magistrates and the appearance of the military' the disorders were quickly suppressed.⁸ Later in the year the King, by a Proclamation, admitted that 'in consequence of the high price of provisions', 'riotous proceedings' had taken place in several parts of the kingdom. 'In some instances', confessed the King, 'corn and other articles' of pro-

¹ *York Courant*, May 2, 1796.

³ *Ibid.*, November 27, 1797.

⁵ *Gent's. Mag.*, 1799, pp. 801-2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, February 24, 1800.

² *Ibid.*, July 4, 1796.

⁴ *Leeds Intelligencer*, August 6, 1798.

⁶ *Leeds Intelligencer* January 27, 1800.

⁸ *Ibid.*, May 12, 1800.

visions had been 'violently taken from the owners, and in others the price of these articles' had been 'reduced by threats and intimidations'. As such acts were prejudicial to the peace of the realm the magistrates and officers of the Crown were commanded to punish and suppress them.¹ In spite of the Royal injunction, further acts of violence were committed at 'Nottingham, Mansfield, Stamford, Derby, Sheffield, Norwich, Worcester, Birmingham, London and other places'.²

So the spirit of discontent, having expressed itself so vigorously and continuously in the course of the eighteenth century, remained unappeased at the dawn of a new era. Subsequent events showed that further violence was necessary before the authorities, in their blindness, saw fit to rectify the injustices which burned like fires in men's hearts and minds.

¹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, September 22, 1800.

² *Ibid.*

WIDESPREAD DISTRESS

ANY casual observer of working-class behaviour during the years 1740 to 1800 might easily have come to the conclusion that the majority of the lower orders was disaffected to the point of disloyalty toward the King and his Government. Such a verdict, however, would have been inaccurate, as a careful study of the facts would have proved. Apart from one or two incidents, as, for example, when some angry keelmen at Newcastle proclaimed Prince Charlie to be King of all Britain, or when the populace at Walsall trailed the King's effigy through the mud, afterwards burning it, or when the Royal carriage was attacked in London, there was never any evidence and display of disloyalty, nor any real signs of disaffection toward the Government. Even when the opportunity came in 1745, and again in 1789, for the people to ally themselves with revolutionary movements, they remained aloof. It is no exaggeration to say that the suffering masses of the eighteenth century never tried to alter the Constitution and never openly desired a change in the form of administration. What concerned them most was the adequate meeting of their daily needs. When that became difficult because of high prices and continued exports, they quickly lost their patience and vented their anger in noisy demonstrations. But when commodities remained plentiful and prices fairly stable, then the working classes maintained their tranquillity and disorders became rare. There can be no shadow of doubt about the conclusion that physical distress and anxiety were responsible for the explosions of violence so frequently occurring throughout the greater part of the century.

The year 1740, characterized by food riots in various parts of the country, was one in which distress and want were extremely widespread. 'Compassion to the poor' impelled a would-be poet to express his sentiments in rhyme in the *Daily Post*.¹ Proclaiming that the rich, because of their plentiful supply of fire, food, and clothing, found no difficulty in the coldest weather in keeping themselves warm, the poor, he contends, continued to suffer 'oppressive Want and Hunger's Urgent Pain'. 'How is it', he inquired, that 'naked, hungry, they can bear, in their defenceless State, the Pinching Air?' News from Bristol at this time

¹ January 8, 1740.

told of 'a poor man who begg'd about the streets' having 'perished to death in March Street, thro' extreme cold'. Another report spoke of 'A poor woman' who met a similar fate, having 'perished with cold after she had been delivered'.¹ Because of the extreme poverty, 'Large collections for the necessitous Poor People' were taken in several parishes and, in consequence, 'Money, Bread, Meat, Pease, Coal, &c.' were given for their support.² Writing from Newcastle on January 12, a correspondent declares 'that most of the Handicraft Tradesmen in those parts are deprived of following their several Employments'.³ Coals are said to be 'as scarce with the Poor as money'. But for the charity of Alderman Ridley, 'great numbers of poor Families in Sandgate and other Places must have starved with excessive Cold'.⁴ Similar conditions obtained at Salisbury. Touched by the sight of so many 'Poor Families' being 'reduced to great extremities', 'the Mayor of the town collected £140 for their immediate relief'.⁵ At Norwich the Aldermen and city officers 'went about from Door to Door, distributing money to the necessitous Poor'.⁶ Over £80 was collected by the Minister⁷ and Churchwardens of St. Margaret's, Westminster, for 'the great numbers of Poor who had been brought to the utmost Distress by the Extremity of the Weather'. Being much impressed by 'the Calamities of the Poor', the Mercers' Company subscribed fifty guineas toward their relief.⁸ When reporting the intelligence that a poor woman 'about 30 Years of Age' had been frozen to death in Drury Lane, a correspondent adds the information that 'the Miseries of the Poor at this time suffer by the dearth of Coals and other necessities of life are terrible'.⁹ When a poor man was charged with 'stealing Two penny loaves from a Baker's Shop on Tower Hill', it was found on inquiry that he bore the character of an 'honest industrious Fellow' and that 'he had a Wife and three children starving, and himself out of Business'. A few days later the watermen and fishermen paraded the streets 'with a Peter Boat in mourning', 'imploing Supplies in their present necessities'. This 'deplorable sight moved abundance of Citizens to contribute largely

¹ *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, January 8, 1740.

² *Ibid.*, January 22, 1740. ³ *Ibid.*, January 17, 1740.

⁴ *Ibid.*, January 31, 1740. ⁵ *Ibid.*, January 18, 1740. ⁶ *Ibid.*, January 22, 1740.

⁷ The term 'Minister' was regularly employed in the eighteenth century to denote the local clergyman.

⁸ *Daily Post*, January 23 and 29, 1740.

⁹ *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, January 28, 1740.

to the Support of such deserving objects'.¹ One observer maintains that 'such Swarms of miserable Objects as now fill our Streets are shocking to behold'. Having nowhere to go, many of them are driven from parish to parish. 'Several have perished in the Street for Want.'² A similar story is told by another correspondent. 'The present exorbitant Price of Coals is almost an Interdiction to the Poor.' 'Great Numbers of Poor wretches have perished with Hunger and Cold.' 'Our streets still swarm with Beggars.' 'Want of Business has already introduced a Habit of Idleness among the Poor.' 'Had it not been for the charity of the rich we should long ago have seen the Town heap'd up with Dead, as in the Time of a Plague.'³ At Trowbridge the distressed weavers adopted a novel method to draw attention to their unfortunate condition. Thinking that Justice Cooper might be of assistance to them, twenty-four of their number drew a wagon-load of coal from Timsbury to Trowbridge to give it to his lordship.⁴

Dissatisfaction at the high price of foodstuffs was the chief and perhaps primary cause of the riots in 1740. The disorder at Dewsbury was occasioned by the mob's endeavour to prevent the badgers from sending their corn into Lancashire, the belief being that such export 'enhanced the Price of Corn . . . to the oppression of the Poor'.⁵ Reporting the riot at Peterborough, John Creed confessed that the trouble arose 'chiefly in the Corn Markets' because so much grain was being sent abroad. 'The winter has been very severe with the Pore', and he asserts that 'if the Corn is not prevented from being transported we must expect other disturbances'.⁶ A petition for military assistance from the Mayor of Colchester acknowledged that 'the pressing necessities of the Poor' had 'reduced them to a miserable condition'. 'Several dangerous Tumults to hinder the exportation of corn' had already taken place. This continued exportation was believed to be the real cause of food shortage and consequent high prices.⁷ Describing the disturbance at Stockton, one observer declared that the loading of grain for export had been 'the sole cause of the Riots'.⁸ Being very anxious to free themselves from all responsibility in the Newcastle riots,

¹ *Daily Post*, February 4 and 14, 1740.

² *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, February 15, 1740.

³ *The Country Journal or Craftsman*, February 16, 1740.

⁴ *Daily Post*, February 21, 1740.

⁵ *S.P.*, 36, 50. *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, May 10, 1740.

⁶ *S.P.*, 36, 50.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

the magistrates told the State Secretary that the pitmen had used the high prices as 'a pretence' to break open 'the granaries of Several Corn Merchants'.¹ The *Daily Post*, however, bluntly asserted that the disorders were due entirely 'to the Corn-factors keeping up the Price of Grain'. Not only had they failed to keep their promise to sell corn at a cheaper rate, but in addition they had closed their shops, so preventing the sale of any grain. As the colliers were unable to buy corn, they 'plundered from the granaries' all that they required.²

Restriction of supplies at Sunderland was the main cause of the disorders there. Fear of a shortage of grain provided a Colchester mob with a plausible reason for raiding the granaries at Manningtree. The riots at Wisbech and Norwich had a similar origin, corn having been seized at both places to hinder its export abroad.³ The unfortunate man ordered to be transported seven years for his share in the disturbance at Wellingborough admitted that corn was commandeered to defeat the engrosser and exporter.⁴ Yet in spite of these protests, wheat continued to be sent overseas. On Monday, May 5, a thousand quarters were shipped to France from London; reporting the fact, a correspondent expressed the opinion that 'charity should begin at home'.⁵ Other consignments were sent on May 21. One of the London newspapers contended that this foreign trade made the price of bread to rise 'to the great detriment of the poor'.⁶ The women of Dover showed their resentment to such exports by cutting the sacks and taking away the grain the farmers had intended to send to France. According to a verdict of the Lords Justices in Council, all the engrossing and much of the exporting were at variance with the law. Calling attention to the judgement, they admitted on June 28 that the evasion led 'to the great oppression of the poor'. Deciding to prevent further evasions, they declared that henceforth no licence would be given but in accordance with the law.⁷ It was still possible, however, under the existing law to export a large amount of grain, and even a bounty was given to encourage it. On Saturday, August 30, the *Ipswich Journal* asserted that 'no less than 1500£ of Bounty Money is paid' at the Custom House Weekly', and that 'the exportation of so much Corn has been a sad misfortune to the Poor'. 'Many

¹ S.P., 36, 51.

² *Daily Post*, July 3, 1740.

³ S.P., 36, 51.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁵ *Ipswich Journal*, May 10, 1740.

⁶ *Ibid.*, May 31, 1740.

⁷ *Ibid.*, July 5, 1740, taken from the *London Gazette* of June 28, 1740.

families have no Wheaten Bread at all. Most of them live upon Barley and Oats.' Wheat at this time in some places had reached the high price of 9s. to 10s. a bushel.

Distress and unemployment were extremely severe in the industrial areas of the South-West. Many of the substantial clothiers had to close their establishments. 'Trade and they', said one reporter, 'have *shook Hands* and *took leave* of each other.' More than ten thousand poor 'who used to live by the Sweat of their Brows, will become a Burthen to their different Parishes for their *daily Bread*, in Somerset only'.¹ The rising of the miners at Kingswood was in reality a visible and emphatic protest against the prevailing prices. Although the magistrates asserted that prices were fixed as low as possible, the colliers were far from being satisfied; ultimately they had to be dispersed by the threat of the military.² Letters from Frome tell of 'the misery of the people there for want of employ'. Intelligence from other places revealed that 'several poor People belonging to the Woollen Manufacturers, having no Employment, have been obliged to eat Grains for their Sustenance'.³ In Wiltshire and Gloucestershire 'some thousands of Hands' were said to be 'unemploy'd and near starving'. Conditions were no better in the clothing district of Exeter. Large numbers of poor people 'were reduced for want of Employment to eat Grains'.⁴ At Chipping Campden the local authorities endeavoured to relieve the distress by employing nearly seventy persons 'in repairing the Highways' at the wage of 8d. a day, 'besides one Penny a Day for to buy them Small Beer'.⁵ Eventually a bill 'to prohibit for a limited Time the exportation of Corn and other Provisions' was read a second time in the House of Commons. To expedite its operation, the King was requested to order an embargo immediately on the export of 'Corn, Grain, Starch, Rice, Beef, Pork and other Provisions of Victuals'.⁶

Conditions in the early months of 1741 were not much better than those of 1740. A correspondent to the *Daily Post* signing himself 'C. D.' roundly charged the dealers in corn with 'Avarice' and 'Rogery'. 'Thousands and Thousands of families are starving, more for want of work than by the High Price of Provisions.'⁷ Another correspondent writing from Bristol and

¹ *Ipswich Journal*, September 6, 1740.

² *S.P.*, 36, 52.

³ *Ipswich Journal*, October 25, 1740.

⁴ *Ibid.*, November 1, 1740.

⁵ *Daily Post*, November 27, 1740.

⁶ *Gent's Mag.*, 1741, p. 633. *Ipswich Journal*, December 6, 1740.

⁷ January 23, 1741.

describing himself as an 'Eye Witness of the Calamities of the Poor' declares that 'many poor unhappy Creatures live at this Juncture upon Grains even in this city'. Some of the farmers in the neighbourhood of Taunton and Ilchester were brought 'so low and miserable as to feed on like Food'.¹ At Spitalfields the labouring classes were said to be 'starving by thousands for want of work', 'yet in another part of the town' 'the Theatres, Ridotts, and Concerts have never been more crowded'.² A report from Chester in the *Daily Post* of March 25 speaks of 'the great Distress and Sufferings of the meaner Sort of People in and about that City and parts adjacent, on Account of the High Price of Provisions'. Writing on April 16 the Editor asserted that all the letters from the North brought 'the most melancholy accounts of the Calamities of the People, arising from the excessive Price of all Manner of Provisions, occasioned by the Scarcity thereof'. On July 28 a correspondent signing himself 'A. B.' speaks of the 'great, loud and universal Complaints among the poor . . . and starved Artificers' in Staffordshire.³ According to a London correspondent, there were in that city 'more Poor Families in Distress than ever was known'.⁴ In order to relieve the situation, 'Several People of Fashion . . . order'd a Dish less at their Tables every day' that 'the Value of it' might 'be distributed to poor Objects, who Thro' the Badness of Trade and the Dearness of all Sorts of Provisions are reduc'd to great want'.⁵ John Wesley, who knew the condition of the lower classes better than most people, speaks of the sick poor at Kingswood as having no money and being in sore distress.⁶ A few weeks later he refers to the state of the poor and unemployed in London as 'destitute of convenient clothing' and 'many sick and ready to perish'.⁷ The sight of 'unusual Swarms of Sturdy and Clamorous Beggars' in the streets of London compelled the Grand Jury of the King's Bench to consider the matter. After describing it as a dreadful 'nuisance', 'so burthensome and disgraceful' to the city, they decided on the traditional method of enforcing the laws in a more vigorous manner and, thinking mostly of themselves, they added 'that we may not be thus troubled with the Poor'.⁸

Conditions had apparently improved in the next few years,

¹ *Daily Post*, March 13, 1741.

² *Gent's. Mag.*, 1741, p. 105.

³ *Daily Post*.

⁴ *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, March 12, 1741.

⁵ *Ibid.*, March 12, 1741.

⁶ *Journal*, March 23, 1741.

⁷ *Ibid.*, May 7.

⁸ *Gent's. Mag.*, 1741, p. 304.

for very few references to distress and want can be found in contemporary publications. Occasionally some correspondent refers to the state of the poor. For example, the *Daily Post* in its issue of Friday, May 14, 1742, contained a letter over the signature 'C. D.'; speaking of Frome, the writer says 'the misery of the inhabitants is almost incredible. The People are wholly out of Employ and in want of the Common necessities of Life.' On March 2, 1744, John Wesley is so affected by the condition of the poor in London that he makes a collection for them.¹ Three weeks later he provides them with clothing. A very pathetic incident was reported from the parish of Stamfordham in Northumberland on January 24, 1745. A poor woman, compelled to seek charity for her starving children, had the anguish of seeing two of them die of starvation in the street. A third child 'had its arms froze'. This child and the mother next morning were found in a deplorable condition.² Another case of death through starvation was reported from London a few weeks later. 'A man' described as 'indifferently dressed' was found dead in Lincoln's Inn Fields, supposed to have perish'd thro' want'.³

In the course of the next ten years, 1750 to 1760, distress repeatedly afflicted the poor. Writing on April 26, 1751, to the State Secretary, a correspondent at Ross-on-Wye maintained that the inhabitants in that place were 'so poorly supplied with wheat that there has not been for a long time a Quantity Sufficient to furnish half the necessary Wants of the Labouring Poor'. Although the harvest was regarded as 'Plentiful and well put in', 'the Labouring People were greatly distressed for want of bread'.⁴

The disturbance at Bristol on May 21, 1753, was ostensibly caused by 'the Excessive price of provisions'. When asked by messengers why they were marching to the city, the Kingswood colliers replied that 'they were going to Bristol to get their Bread Cargo'. On being asked by the Mayor why they were demonstrating in such a violent manner, they told him it was because of 'the present High Price of wheat'.⁵

Undoubtedly the riots of 1756 were due to the distressed condition of the labouring classes. Some Quakers in the vicinity of Nuneaton were blamed for the increased cost of living, and in consequence their places of worship and private property

¹ *Journal*.

² *Westminster Journal*, February 9, 1745.

³ *Ibid.*, March 16, 1745.

⁴ *S.P.*, 36, 116.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 122.

were attacked.¹ A writer to the State Secretary designating himself as 'E. F.' confessed that the weavers 'have not full employment'. This, 'joyned to the present Dearth of Corn', was mainly responsible for the outbreak of violence. In the vicinity of Coventry the Bedworth colliers demonstrated against 'the Dearthness of Corn and Bread'. 'The Farmers', declared the enraged miners, 'would sell them nothing . . . on Reasonable Terms.' 'Corn and Cheese', they protested, 'had been engrossed and sent abroad.'² At Nottingham the Mayor freely acknowledged that the disturbances had been caused by 'the High Price of Corn', which was due, he thought, 'to a real Scarcity in the Kingdom'.³ When the bakers and millers were charged with making 'unwholesome bread, not keeping the Assize, Grinding with the Breadcorn other materials, or mixing them with the Meal and Moulding them into bread and selling them to the poor', his successor at the Mayoral Office denied the truth of all these charges.⁴ Writing again to the State Secretary, 'E. F.' confessed that 'the poor universally complain' because they believe that 'corn is unnecessarily sent abroad'.⁵ A petition from Leeds signed by the Mayor, Aldermen, and others, comprising altogether one hundred and forty-eight names, admitted that 'the Corn and Grain grown in that part of the Country is by no means sufficient to maintain the numbers of People there inhabiting the land'. 'The poor manufacturer', they contended, 'cannot out of his present wages provide himself with Bread for the ordinary Support of himself and Family.' Because of this state of affairs they petitioned His Majesty to prevent the exportation of grain and to encourage import by opening the port of Hull.⁶ On Monday, August 30, the *Public Advertiser* announced that 'the Price of Bread has rose no less than six times since the beginning of May, viz. a Penny per Peck each Time'; 'a very heavy Burden upon the poor labouring People of this Kingdom'. But wheat continued to be sent abroad, four hundred thousand quarters being exported annually.⁷ Reporting the Sheffield riot, a correspondent to the *Bath Advertiser* on Monday, September 6, said the real cause of the trouble was 'the fixing of the price of wheat at one guinea in comparison to 17s. a few days before'. Another correspondent declared that if all the dealers were compelled to bring their corn to the market and sell it at 5s. a bushel, 'it would probably

¹ S.P., 36, 135.² *Ibid.*³ *Ibid.*⁴ *Ibid.*, 136.⁵ *Ibid.*⁶ *Ibid.*⁷ September 3, 1756.

prevent the oppression of the poor'.¹ 'The Badness of Trade and Dearness of Provisions' were said to be responsible for the disorder among the weavers at Stroud.² Writing from Wellington on November 11, a correspondent gave his view that 'the great Price of Corn in these Parts has almost starved the Colliers and Common People, who have actually eat Nothing but Grains and Salt for many Days'.³ According to another observer, the poor people of Broseley were 'no longer able to subsist, on Account of the excessive Price of Grain'.⁴ Acknowledging the necessity of some reduction in the price of grain, Sir Thomas Whitmore and Sir Richard Acton went to Bridgnorth Market and 'obliged their tenants to sell wheat at 5s. per bushel, or under', at the same time promising to compensate them by forgoing their rents for a few weeks.⁵ Not satisfied with the conduct of the millers, bakers, and engrossers at Nottingham, a number of 'Gentlemen, Burgesses and Freeholders' forwarded an address to Lord Howe and Sir W. Aston, their representatives in the House of Commons, requesting them to institute an inquiry in Parliament concerning the matter.⁶ At Kidderminster 'the poor Manufacturing People' were said to be 'half starved through the excessive Price of Corn'.⁷ Similar conditions were found in Bristol. When discussing the cause of the various disturbances, the *Gentleman's Magazine* declared that the high price of corn was mainly responsible.⁸ A prominent clergyman took the same view, concluding that the farmers, millers, and corn factors had produced this state of affairs.⁹ The merchants, he added, were not free from blame, because they kept their corn 'when people are starving'.¹⁰ Even the King confessed he was not 'unmindful of the sufferings of the Poor from the present high Price of Grain'.¹¹ Parliament at last brought in a Bill to prohibit for a time the exportation of corn, malt, meal, flour, bread, biscuit, and starch. An Order in Council a few days later made the desired prohibition.¹²

The decade 1760 to 1770 provides additional evidence of the widespread want and distress. They did not desire to see their

¹ *Bath Advertiser*, September 11, 1756.

² *Ibid.*, October 30, 1756.

³ *Ibid.*, November 20, 1756. *Public Advertiser*, November 18, 1756.

⁴ *Public Advertiser*, November 18, 1756.

⁵ *Ibid.* Also *Bath Advertiser*, November 20, 1756.

⁶ *Public Advertiser*, November 19, 1756.

⁷ *Ibid.*, November 22, 1756.

⁸ 1756, p. 544.

⁹ *Bath Advertiser*, November 27, 1756.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Bath Advertiser*, December 4, 1756. *Gent's. Mag.*, 1756, p. 577.

¹² *Gent's. Mag.*, 1756, p. 591.

children 'weep for bread and none to give them', shouted the rioters from Rossendale, Rochdale, and Saddleworth, as they raided the premises of certain 'obnoxious employers' at Manchester in the autumn of 1762; vengeance was vowed on all the 'canables' and 'men slayers'. Seeking to justify their lawless conduct, they cried out: 'We may as well all be hanged as starved to death.'¹ Conditions apparently were little better in Leeds during the ensuing winter. A public appeal was made for the poor of the town and a sum of £300 was immediately raised.² At Ely the situation was described as 'every day more melancholy, the inhabitants being in the utmost distress'.³ Two years later 'a very considerable body of poor unemployed weavers' went one morning in May 'with two flags before them from Spitalfields to St. James's to implore relief in their present calamitous circumstances'.⁴ While rioters were pulling down the workhouse at Bulcamp on August 5, 1765, they declared to those remonstrating with them that they intended to reduce the price of wheat and 'to pull down the mills'.⁵ At Nacton Heath on the same day another mob, emphatic that 'the poor sho'd be maintained in their own parishes', voiced the opinion that they themselves 'might as well Die there as be starved'.⁶ The local magistrates reproving them, 'they replied, they did not care, they would succeed or die on the spot'.⁷ Referring to the treatment of the unfortunate people in the workhouses, it was 'agreed on all hands that the poor who were admitted into those places were never permitted to go out nor be seen by any friend'.⁸ Writing from Lancashire on September 15, an observer, very despondent about things, confessed that 'the poor are likely to become more numerous and miserable than ever the ensuing winter'. 'Many thousands of people', he added, 'at Manchester, Birmingham, Leicester and Nottingham will probably starve this year for want of work and money to buy food.' 'It is really a hard matter to keep people quiet who have nothing to eat. If the exportation of wheat is not speedily stopped, the consequences may be dreadful'.⁹ The poor distressed miners in the vicinity of Newcastle found a sympathetic advocate of their cause when Richard Atkinson made it known to the

¹ *London Chronicle*, September 11, 1762.

² *Leeds Intelligencer*, February 1, 1763.

³ *Ibid.*, March 1, 1763.

⁴ *Lloyd's Evening Post*, May 13-15, 1765.

⁵ *S.P.*, 37, 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Lloyd's Evening Post*, August 12-14, September 20-3, 1765.

⁸ *Public Ledger*, September 5, 1765.

⁹ *Lloyd's Evening Post*, September 20-3, 1765.

readers of *Lloyd's Evening Post* that these hard-working colliers, for the paltry sum of less than a penny an hour, had to encounter numerous perils and endure a drudgery which the veriest slave in the plantations of America would regard as intolerable. They regularly worked sixteen to seventeen hours a day for the noble sum of 7s. a week. When too old to work, they 'are cast off to the wretchedness both of poverty and disease'.¹

Widespread distress and numerous disturbances came with the autumn of 1766. Writing from Wiltshire on September 21, a reporter contended that the term 'exportation' was just as shocking 'as that of a Bounty given to starve the Poor'.² Wheat was costing at Warminster 12s. a bushel, large measure. Describing one of the riots, he said the mob wanted bread at a reasonable price for their children to eat. Wheat was actually fetching 16s. to 17s. at Plymouth for a double Winchester bushel. 'The hardships the poor suffered . . . could scarce be expressed.' Another correspondent in the same district maintained that 'the distresses of the poor are melancholy beyond description'.³ After the price of bread in London had been put up 1d. per peck loaf, the Recorder laid a letter before the Court of Aldermen 'setting forth the great distresses of the poor and the fatal consequences that must ensue if some method is not taken to prevent them'. The Court of Aldermen ultimately decided to ask the Sheriffs 'to lay the affair before the Privy Council', expressing the hope 'that some measures will be taken to stop the exportation of corn, which, if suffered to continue, must inevitably finish the miseries of the poor'.⁴

News of great distress came from Devizes. In Peterborough the fear was that there would be a 'want of wheat for bread'. The bakers in the town of Bolton were reported to have had no flour 'to make bread for the people'. Millers at Lynn were said to be without a sufficient amount of flour to supply their bakers. The price of wheat at this time had gone up to 48s. a quarter.⁵ High prices and consequent distress were experienced in Cornwall. Wheat sold at 8s. a bushel, barley at 4s. 6d., while meat was 4½d. to 6d. a pound, and butter 9d. a pound.⁶ Finally, the King in Council, on September 24 prohibited the export of wheat until November 14. At the same time, he forbade the distilling from wheat, meal, flour, and bran.⁷ When the

¹ *Lloyd's Evening Post*, September 25-7, 1765.

² *London Chronicle*, September 23-5, 1766.

³ *Lloyd's Evening Post*, September 22-4, 1766.

⁶ *Ibid.*, September 23-5, 1766.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, September 26-9, 1766.

mobs sought to destroy the Bradley and Beckington mills near Frome, the local Member of Parliament, with some other gentry, confronted the rioters, pointing out the dangerous consequences of their riotous behaviour. But it was pleaded 'they had not eat a morsel of bread for three days, but had subsisted on grains, &c., and that their wives and families were in the same miserable condition'.¹ From Norwich it was reported that provisions in that city had risen in the last four years to double the previous price. Meat was selling at 6d. a pound and butter at 10d.² Rioters at Coventry had seized some cheese and sold it cheaply to the poor; many of the children, it was claimed, had never had a taste of such food for several months. A very pathetic case was reported from Benwell in the North of England; a boy, at the beginning of October, was found dead on the highway, his mother almost dead beside him, through starvation. 'Very shocking to humanity' to see 'people dying for want', commented a correspondent.³ Another correspondent, 'R. A.', pointed out that 'since provisions have been so dear, the labouring people have been unable to purchase those conveniences they used to enjoy, and have been constrained to suffer those dreadful calamities, hunger, misery and nakedness'.⁴ 'Amicus', in the same newspaper, spoke of 'the inexpressible misery and distress of the industrious poor throughout the kingdom'. This condition, he believed, was the main cause of all the disturbances.⁵ Reports from Gloucestershire at the beginning of November described the trade in that area as 'excessively dull'. 'The diet of some', it was said, had been 'grains and salt'.⁶

Conditions were slightly better in the year 1767, but suffering there still was. In Devon the High Sheriff and Grand Jury told the county Members of Parliament that they viewed 'with the deepest concern . . . the distress of the people on account of the high price of all kinds of provisions daily increasing'.⁷ News from Tetbury later in the year was to the effect that thousands of poor people were starving 'for want of employment', while at the same time the cost of provisions was 'very dear'. 'It is shocking to see how many of these poor creatures are begging

¹ *Lloyd's Evening Post*, September 26-9, 1766.

² *Ibid.*, September 29-October 1, 1766.

³ *Ibid.*, October 6-8, 1766. *London Chronicle*, October 4-7, 1766.

⁴ *Lloyd's Evening Post*, October 6-8, 1766.

⁵ *Ibid.*, October 20-2, 1766.

⁶ *Ibid.*, November 12-14, 1766.

⁷ *Ibid.*, April 15-17, 1767.

about the country . . . ready to sink for Want.'¹ From Portsmouth on December 13, a correspondent wrote, 'all kinds of provisions here are inexpressibly dear, so that the poor must inevitably perish this winter'.²

Most of the riots in London in April and May, 1768, were the direct outcome of the prevalent high prices and consequent distress. Sailors, coalporters, and watermen joined with weavers and tailors in protesting against the increasing cost of living. Unable to succeed in reducing the price level, they began to agitate for an increase in wages.³

The years 1772 and 1773 brought sore distress. 'An Old Fashioned Farmer' believed that enclosures were the main cause of the suffering and want. In the *London Evening Post* on Thursday, January 23, 1772, he asserted that 'wheat is now at Coventry 8s. a strike, Beef 4d. to 5d. a pound, Mutton 4d., Pork 5d. to 6d., Bacon 8d. to 9d., Butter 10d., Cheese 4d. to 5d., all which are double the prices to what such articles sold for before enclosing our open fields was established by Act of Parliament'. 'The present dismal distress . . . (seen in all trading towns, occasioned by the excessive high price of provisions) which the poor now labour under, is enough to melt any heart.' So sharp and severe were the conditions in the vicinity of Salisbury that the Mayor and Corporation, considering 'the present excessive high price of all sorts of grain', unanimously decided to petition Parliament 'to import corn, flour and meal from foreign parts, to prevent the poor from starving'.⁴ The gentlemen of Bristol went a step further 'to check the infamous practice of Combination and Forestalling' by establishing an agency to purchase meat. They hoped 'to reduce the present exorbitant price of that article' to the poor. Some of the folk of better-class people in Birmingham adopted the same methods as the gentry of Bristol.⁵ Once more the 'Old Fashioned Farmer' took the side of the poor. Enclosures have 'visibly increased the price of provisions', he wrote. Consequently 'the poor are now looked upon as a troublesome, if not a useless, set of subjects'.⁶ Later he declared that enclosures 'starve one part of the nation, while the other wallows in plenty'. He summoned the common people to use their traditional right to petition the King against en-

¹ *Lloyd's Evening Post*, December 14-16, 1767.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Westminster Journal*, April 30, May 14, 1768.

⁴ *Westminster Journal and Political Miscellany*, February 8, 1772.

⁵ *Norwich Mercury*, February 22, 1772.

⁶ *London Evening Post*, February 25-7, 1772.

closures. 'Let it not be said that you were such negligent wretches as to suffer one half of the people to be starved to death for the sake of enriching a few individuals by enclosing.'¹ 'All sorts of provisions', another correspondent argued, 'are kept up at a most exorbitant Price, so as to distress all but the opulent.'² In the same paper a week later a citizen of London appealed to the Lord Mayor and Common Council to be 'no longer deaf to the Cries of the Poor and Needy'. Because of the dearness of provisions, many citizens labour under 'the greatest difficulties and distress'.³ In the *London Evening Post* a correspondent in Woodbridge in Suffolk avowed it to be 'impossible to describe the distresses of the poor in this part of the county for want of bread corn'.⁴ Other writers came into the crusade against high prices. Francis Moore, who often wrote on the subject, thought that the 'extravagant prices were owing to a real scarcity'.⁵ 'A Lover of King and Country' wrote to Lord North to remind him of the excessive price of provisions, and adds: 'We are, in the midst of plenty, reduced to a deplorable State.' 'The poor now experience all the Horrors of (a real or artificial) famine.'⁶ Charlotte McCarthy came out with the statement that 'the Poor are not able to get the where-with-all by honest Industry'. They are 'reduced to the greatest extremities of want and distress'. Compelled to live in such conditions, they are obliged to rob, steal, or perish.⁷ News from Portsmouth was just as sombre: 'numbers of poor people in that part must perish'.⁸ Eventually several petitions were presented to the House of Commons 'complaining of the present high price of corn'. They were referred to a committee and seem to have had little effect.⁹ From Bristol, the King was besought to intervene, for he, better than anyone else, can bring 'a Bout so good a Cause as that of lowering the price of provisions'. The 'want of more cattle in ye land', it is argued, is 'the great cause of the dearness of provisions'. It is suggested that the King, through his Privy Council, should require all Church members to refrain from eating flesh, not only in Lent, but on every Friday in the year.¹⁰ Another petition implored

¹ *London Evening Post*, March 24, April 7, 1772. ² *Westminster Journal*, March 14, 1772.

³ *Ibid.*, March 21, 1772.

⁴ *London Evening Post*, March 28, 1772.

⁵ *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, March 23, April 4, 1772.

⁶ *Westminster Journal*, March 28, 1772.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, April 11, 1772.

⁹ *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, April 18, 1772.

¹⁰ *S.P.*, 37, 9.

the King to stop the enclosing of lands and revert to the old custom of growing wheat in the fields.¹ So great was the distress and consequent unrest in Colchester that the Mayor, Corporation, and the principal inhabitants at a public meeting considered how to supply the poor with cheap corn. After mature discussion, they decided to petition Parliament by 'setting forth in the strongest terms the calamitous State of the Poor in this place, and the immediate necessity of measures being taken for reducing the exorbitant price of Provisions'.² Donations were to be solicited 'to relieve the Distresses of the Poor'.³ And a correspondent gave his opinion to the Home Office 'that nothing but reducing the price of all kinds of provisions . . . can keep the Peace in this and the neighbouring Counties'. They had no market, he said, on the previous Saturday. Nor had they 'any Butchers Meat, Corn, Meal or Flour' for several days.⁴ One of the rioters in the disturbance at Bury St. Edmunds reported that 'their earnings would not maintain them as Provisions were, and they might as well die by a Halter as be starved to death'.⁵ On April 26, the riots over, the reason for the enhanced prices is disclosed. 'It is discovered that three opulent farmers within a few miles of this town have made a practice for some years of sending wheat and live cattle to France . . . Our jail is full of poor, unhappy wretches for being concerned in the late riots, and their families are starving for bread, for the poor were never in so unhappy a situation in this country as they are at this time, and every method is made use of to keep them in distress'.⁶ Reporting the riot at Chelmsford, the Rev. Tindall informed Lord Rochford that 'provisions of all sorts are . . . extremely dear'. He told his lordship that a subscription was being raised for the poor, and the noble Lord appeared to be highly indignant that such a charitable thing should be sponsored by the magistrates.⁷ An observer signing himself 'J. W.' commented on the alarming condition of Great Britain. 'The scarcity of all manner of provisions makes the price so exorbitant that a laborious man with a family can scarcely shift to keep life and soul in unity'.⁸

After the harvest, conditions seemed to be somewhat better, but in some parts of the country there was still unemployment. At Norwich, on October 27, John Wesley declares that he

¹ *S.P.*, 37, 9.

² *Daily Advertiser*, April 18, 1772.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *S.P.*, 37, 9.

⁵ *Daily Advertiser*, April 18, 1772.

⁶ *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, April 30, 1772.

⁷ *S.P.*, 37, 9.

⁸ *London Evening Post*, May 23, 1772.

found 'abundance of people . . . out of work, and consequently in the utmost want, such a general decay of trade having hardly been known in the memory of man'.¹ Writing a few weeks later to some of the London papers, he asks, 'Why are thousands of people starving? . . . I have seen it with my eyes in every corner of the land. I have known those who could only afford to eat a little coarse food every other day. I have known one picking up stinking sprats from a dunghill and carrying them home for herself and her children. I have known another gathering the bones which the dogs have left in the streets and making broth of them to prolong a wretched life.' 'Why are so many thousand people in London, in Bristol, in Norwich, in every county from one end of England to the other, utterly destitute of employment?'²

Evidence in the same strain came in from other observers. So alarming was the situation in London that the Lord Mayor and the Common Council were called together on November 13 'to consider the most effectual means of lowering the . . . price of provisions'. A committee was appointed to examine the problem.³ At a later meeting of the Council, the Lord Mayor confessed 'that the situation in the metropolis in respect to the supply of corn was very alarming', and 'the present appearance seemed to threaten almost a famine'.⁴ When the Council met to consider the report of the committee, they decided to recommend to Parliament 'the stoppage of distillation of corn, and the permitting the importation of all sorts of grain, duty free'.⁵ In an open and public letter to the King, a Middlesex freeholder reminded His Majesty that 'trade in all parts of your kingdom is declining'; in consequence, there is 'a scarcity of provisions'; at the same time, the taxes and forestalling are filling 'the coffers of a few' and 'starving the whole kingdom'.⁶

Reports of distress continued to be published in the early part of 1773. Intelligence from the country districts revealed that 'the distress of the poor Cottagers' was 'beyond description'. They possessed 'no hog, no cow, no poultry, no wood'. 'In this disastrous condition', not having sufficient nourishment, 'they pine away with hunger, with cold, with nakedness, on the

¹ *Journal*.

² *Lloyd's Evening Post*, December 21, 1772. *London Chronicle*, December 17-19, 1772. *Leeds Mercury*, December 29, 1772. Tyerman, *Life of Wesley*, vol. 3, pp. 130-4.

³ *London Evening Post*, November 12-14, 1772.

⁴ *Ibid.*, November 14-17, 1772.

⁵ *Ibid.*, November 19-21, 1772.

⁶ *Ibid.*, November 28-December 1, 1772.

meagre subsistence of a parish allowance'. A woman was found in one home 'sitting on the floor surrounded with seven naked and starving children', having nothing to sustain them but 4s. 6d. a week from the parish.¹ News from Birmingham, Sheffield, and Wolverhampton told of 'a great stagnation in the iron branches of manufactory'. Slackness in trade meant that the workers themselves were 'in circumstances equally distressed with the poor weavers of Spitalfields'.² 'Thousands of journeymen' were 'unemployed in the weaving manufactory'. According to one account, 'not less than 12,000 souls, in and about the three parishes of Spitalfields, Shoreditch and Bethnal Green, either weavers or dependent on that Manufactory, are at this time out of all manner of employ'.³ Not satisfied with the efforts of the local authorities to relieve their ever 'increasing distresses', the weavers of Spitalfields decided to approach the King. On April 17, Sir John Fielding informed Lord Rochford that the silk-weavers intended 'to wait upon his Majesty daily to acquaint him of their distress'. A handbill announced the intention in large and vigorous type: 'To the Poor Distressed Journeymen Weavers and their Families in London. . . . Now is the time to stand up to save yourselves, your wives and Families from Perishing with Hunger. . . . The King does not know your distresses. . . . Fellow sufferers, carry the truth to the King.' By going every day to him, 'his Majesty may see our misery, he will then be convinced of our distress, and his Royal Heart will bleed to behold us'. A copy of the handbill was sent 'To the Poor Distressed Coal Heavers in London', and 'To the Poor Watermen, Porters, Carmen and their Families and all other Poor People who are distressed by the Deadness of Trade and the Present High Price of Provisions'. Accompanying the handbill was a letter (a copy of which was sent to Alderman Oliver and afterwards to Lord Rochford) asking 'the whole Body of Weavers, Coalheavers, Watermen, Carmen, Porters, &c.' 'to become messengers of their own distress'. As 'a body of starving people', they claimed the right to make known their condition to His Majesty. Having prepared their petition, in which they speak of 'the great Cries and Complaints of the Unemployed', their 'present Distress' and the 'too Visible Increasing Misery', they began to make final arrangements to

¹ *London Chronicle*, January 5-7, 1773.

² *London Evening Post*, January 28-30, 1773.

³ *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, February 9, 1773.

take it to the King. The local magistrates became alarmed at the prospect, and did their utmost to prevent them from carrying out their purpose. After much negotiation with the workmen and continued correspondence with the Government, the masters and weavers were called to a conference. As a result of the negotiations, extra work was provided, wages were increased, and peace was restored to the neighbourhood.¹

Though distress was not so common in 1774 as in the two previous years, more than six thousand people had to be helped by charity in Leeds.² Similar assistance was given to the poor in Doncaster, Malton and York. Conditions were bad on Tyneside, and collections were made for the unemployed in Newcastle. Towards the end of the year, trade was said to be at a standstill in Exeter, and the poor suffered much.

In the January of 1775 the 'Old Fashioned Farmer' once more took up his pen. Charging the 'Avaricious landowners' with robbing 'the poor of their rights and privileges', he prophesies rather grimly that 'unless importation and the plow are encouraged, the poor will be in danger of eating one another'.³ The necessities of the poor persuaded Sir John Fielding and his fellow magistrates to institute a subscription to relieve 'the real distresses of many of the industrious in that Jurisdiction'.⁴ Later in the year 'letters from Cornwall pathetically describe the miserable situation of the working poor throughout that county, particularly the tin-miners, numbers of whom, with their families . . . want not only employment, but even the common necessities of life'.⁵ John Wesley is reported to have said concerning conditions at this time 'that in the several great manufacturing towns where he had lately been, trade was in general so bad that the poor were in a very deplorable situation'.⁶ The inability of the Government to solve the problem of unemployment and lift the burden from the people was evidenced by the conclusions reached in the two Committee Reports published in the course of the year; the Poor Laws were ineffective in the relief of unemployment and distress; much of 'the cruel and severe treatment' which the poor 'frequently receive' could be avoided 'if the Disputes about Settlements and Removals of the poor between one Parish or Place and another in the same county could be prevented'.¹

¹ S.P. 37, 10.

³ *London Evening Post*, January 12-14, 1775.

⁵ *London Evening Post*, November 21-3, 1775.

² *York Courant*, February 8, 1774.

⁴ *York Courant*, January 18, 1775.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Report on the Laws Relating to the Poor*. First and Second Reports, 1775.

Conditions in certain parts seem to have been very severe in 1777. Visiting his own people at Bethnal Green in the early part of the year, John Wesley found them in such poverty as scarcely anyone could conceive. 'I have not found any such distress, no, not in the prison of Newgate. One poor man was just creeping out of his sick bed, to his ragged wife and three little children, who were more than half naked, and the very picture of famine; when one bringing in a loaf of bread, they all ran, seized upon it, and tore it in pieces in an instant.'¹

Accounts of distress during the decade 1780 to 1790 come from various sources. 'The situation of the poor' in Colne at the beginning of 1780 'is rendered pitiable, not only by the distress occasioned by the madness of the late mobs . . . but also by sickness.' 'There is hardly a house where there is not one sick or one dead.'² So widespread was the distress at the close of 1782 that the King in his Address to Parliament called attention to 'the Scarcity and consequent high price of corn', and desired both Houses to do something in the matter.³ In different parts of the country the traders and local gentry were so impressed by the degree of poverty that special meetings were called to consider how 'to alleviate the necessities of their fellow citizens, during the present high price of corn'. Wheat at the time was selling at 42s. to 55s. a quarter.⁴

Privations were still more severe in 1783. At various places some of the leading inhabitants sought to soften the austerities by liberality of monetary gifts. The city of York raised £961 11s. 6d. 'to purchase and retail Corn, Flour or Bread to Housekeepers of low and distressed circumstances . . . at more reasonable Rates than the present Market Price'.⁵ On March 11 the worsted weavers of Leeds published a petition setting forth reasons for an increase in wages. Some of them, it was claimed, 'have large Families' and 'are very much distressed' 'by reason of the very high Price of Provisions'.⁶ As a protest against high prices, rioters at Halifax and Huddersfield seized all available corn and sold it at a lower price than that prevailing in the market.⁷ A similar procedure was adopted at Bradford.

In January of 1784 several compassionate collections were made in York. 'Upwards of 800 poor persons in great distress' were assisted in the Walmgate Parish. A correspondent hoped

¹ *Journal*, January 15, 1777.

² *Ibid.*, December 10, 1782.

³ *York Courant*, January 14, 1783.

⁴ *Ibid.*, June 17, 1783. *H.O.*, 42, 2.

⁵ *Leeds Intelligencer*, February 15, 1780.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Leeds Intelligencer*, March 11, 1783.

that other parishes would do likewise to relieve the 'victims of the Cold and Hunger'.¹ At Doncaster more than fifteen hundred people received help from charitable sources. In February over five thousand people in distress were succoured in Manchester. Unemployment and penury increased at this time; no doubt the return of the soldiers to civilian life at the end of the American War was one of the causes. To advertise their distressed condition, unemployed labourers at Manchester drew a wagon full of goods from that town to Liverpool. Another party of unemployed dragged a wagon from Waverham to Liverpool.² More than three thousand families received compassionate aid in York during the early part of the year. A sum of over £600 was raised at Hull for a like purpose, where it was reported six thousand individuals were in dire need. At Doncaster two vagrants and a child died of exposure as they were being taken in an open cart from one parish to another.³ One correspondent appealed to the richer folk to remember their fellow creatures, who were 'emaciated with Sickness, benumbed with Age, and pining with Hunger'. Many of the wealthy responded well to such appeals, and before the end of February subscriptions for the poor had been raised in York, Doncaster, Bradford, Tadcaster, Leeds, Sigston, Newark, Loughborough, Staindrop, Barnard Castle, Appleby, Morpeth, Gateshead, Newcastle, Carlisle, and other places.⁴ A report from Gloucestershire said that more than two thousand two hundred men, women, and children were saved from extreme distress at Minchin Hampton by being employed at the expense of the parish; many 'poor creatures who before were naked . . . received clothes, also shoes and stockings'.⁵

On the first Tuesday of January, 1785, the *Leeds Intelligencer* touches upon a pamphlet entitled *The Better Management of the Poor*, in which complaint is made concerning 'the oppressive burthen we labour under in maintaining the poor'.⁶ In Leeds an urgent appeal is made for subscriptions to help the needy. The Methodists of London, according to custom, provided coals and bread for the poorer members of their Society. But they needed clothes as well as food. On January 4 'and the four following days, I walked', says John Wesley, 'through the town, and begged two hundred pounds in order to clothe them that

¹ *York Courant*, January 27, 1784.

² *Leeds Intelligencer*, February 24, 1784.

³ *York Courant*, January 27 and February 17, 1784.

⁴ *Ibid.*, February 17 and 24, 1784.

⁵ *Leeds Intelligencer*, November 16, 1784.

⁶ January 4.

wanted it most'.¹ At Colchester on Monday, January 17, he noticed that the Methodists there 'had exceedingly little of this world's goods'.² In April that year the unemployed weavers at York decided to parade the streets 'to convince the Public that great numbers of them were actually out of Employ, and consequently destitute of the means of providing for their numerous Families'. As the parade was peaceful, the magistrates did not disperse them.³

The *Leeds Intelligencer* on January 10, 1786, published a good recipe for soup by means of which 'a number of our poor fellow creatures may be relieved at a very trifling expense'. Later in the year the same newspaper gave prominence to 'The Humble Address and Petition of Thousands who labour in the Cloth Manufactory'. The labourers stoutly maintained 'that the Scribbling Machines have thrown thousands . . . out of employ, whereby we are brought into great distress and are not able to procure a maintenance for our families'. Because of the new inventions, 'eight thousand hands are deprived of the opportunity of getting a livelihood'.⁴

Distress lifts its importunate voice anew in the early part of 1789, and subscriptions were in consequence raised in York, Hull, Doncaster, Pocklington, Richmond, New Malton, and Carlisle.⁵ Bradford, Sheffield, Rotherham, Wakefield, and many other towns followed suit.⁶ More than two thousand families were assisted in Leeds; in Hull over six thousand of the distressed were aided; many 'were found to exist . . . almost without fire or food'. So harsh the poverty in Liverpool that more than ten thousand people had to be assisted.⁷ At Sheffield in the first few weeks of the year a total of at least £700 had been raised for the relief of the poor; by the middle of April over two thousand one hundred and twelve families had received support.⁸

In the last decade of the century, distress and suffering covered the people with darkness and despair. During 1790 various subscriptions were organized in Yorkshire. In the *Leeds Intelligencer* for October 11, 1791, the opinion is expressed that 'the general advance in the necessaries of life may be ascribed not so much to a failure in the produce, as to the increase in consumption from the growing population and the flourishing state of our trade'. On December 27 a correspondent, de-

¹ *Journal*.

² *York Courant*, April 12, 1785.

³ *York Courant*, January 6 and 13, 1789.

⁴ *Ibid.*; February 17, 1789.

⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁶ *Leeds Intelligencer*, June 13, 1786.

⁷ *Leeds Intelligencer*, January 13, 1789.

⁸ *Ibid.*, January 20 and April 14, 1789.

scribing 'the condition of the poor', said they were 'without relief . . . without fuel, without food or the lawful means of procuring them'. He appealed to the charitably minded 'to alleviate the miseries of the distressed part of their fellow creatures'.¹ Early in January, 1792, the town of Shrewsbury was eulogized for a novel scheme of employing the poor.² Ledbury went a step further, even making a profit thereby.³ Before the end of May a violent protest was made at Nottingham against the high price of meat. Violence was threatened at Leicester, Norwich, Sheffield, and Northampton, but by the vigilance of the local magistrates disturbance was avoided.⁴

In the course of 1793 distress grew intenser and many more subscription lists were opened. The one in Manchester was regarded as a great success. 'Donations have cheered the Dwellings of the misery', exclaimed an enthusiast. They 'have relieved whole Families, who were without means of supporting Nature, and have succoured thousands in the most abject want'.⁵ Before the end of the year the inhabitants of Mirfield had subscribed £200 'for the relief of poor families . . . who are out of employ'. By purchasing corn and selling it 'to the poor at two thirds of its real value . . . upwards of 400 families are weekly relieved'.⁶ A few days later those same inhabitants decided that 'no person who keeps a dog shall partake of their bounty, unless the animal be immediately destroyed'.⁷

1795 was a critical year. Distress was rampant and anger threatened. One writer blamed the weather for the sad and sorrowful condition of things; for that reason 'the prices of most of the necessaries of life are enhanced', 'and many of the customary resources of industry are suspended'.⁸ Early in April, when the weather could not be blamed, high prices continued, and vehement protests were made at many points. At Plymouth, it was said, the people had risen because of 'the nefarious practices of the Forestallers'.⁹ At Blatchington in Sussex the Oxford Regiment took matters in hand and commandeered bread and meat from the shops to retail at reduced prices.¹⁰ The Privy Council inquired into the cause of the high prices with a view to suggesting the best and speediest manner of bringing them down.¹¹ A correspondent asserts that in 'the

¹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 1791.

³ *Ibid.*, March 5, 1792.

⁵ *Ibid.*, June 3, 1793.

⁷ *Ibid.*, January 6, 1794.

⁹ *Ibid.*, April 12, 1795.

² *Ibid.*, January 2, 1792.

⁴ *York Courant*, May 22 and June 4, 1792.

⁶ *Leeds Intelligencer*, December 30, 1793.

⁸ *York Courant*, January 26, 1795.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, April 26, 1795.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, May 4, 1795.

present scarcity and consequent dearness of almost every necessary of life, any hint tending to reduce the consumption may be found useful'.¹ 'None of the prime articles of life may be given to dogs or swine, or be thrown away.' A meeting called at Leeds 'to take into consideration the measures to be adopted for procuring a Supply of Corn for the use of the Poor' came to the decision that 'there is a real Scarcity of *Wheaten Flour*'. It was agreed to purchase flour and re-sell it to the poor at 2s. 9d. a stone.² A similar meeting at York made a number of recommendations eventually accepted by the Corporation. Several towns in Yorkshire provided some sort of relief for the unemployed and distressed.³ The members of the Privy Council were so impressed by the shortage of corn and the abnormal prices that they agreed to limit consumption among their own families. The Grand Jury at the ensuing York Assizes decided to follow the example of their lordships. The magistrates of the Three Ridings made the same decision.⁴ Subscriptions to help the poor were raised at Howden, Helperby, Manchester, and Preston. Patience was exhausted at Hull when women and boys combined to protest forcibly against the increase in the price of flour; protests were made at other places.⁵ Considering the high price of wheat at the Leeds Quarter Session, the Grand Jury was unanimous in concluding that the main cause lay in the existence of a real scarcity; the recommendation to every inhabitant was to use 'during the present scarcity . . . a certain proportion of Oaten Bread'.⁶ Through the kindness of some Good Samaritans in Leeds, more than two thousand two hundred and nineteen families were helped to secure bread at reduced prices.⁷ The general unrest and the repeated resorts to aggressive acts compelled William Pitt to bring the problem to the floor of the House of Commons. After mature deliberation, it was decided to continue the Act passed in a previous Session to prohibit the distilling of spirits from wheat, malt, barley, and other articles of grain.⁸ The Hampshire magistrates proved to be rather sympathetic to the poor; and their comment was that 'the price of necessaries has increased in a greater proportion than the wages of labour'.⁹ One authority asserted that the price of flour had gone up from 4s. a bushel to 8s. 4d. as com-

¹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, June 29, 1795.

³ *York Courant*, July 13, 1795.

⁵ *Ibid.*, August 10, 17, 24, 1795.

⁷ *Ibid.*, August 10, 1795.

⁹ *Gent's Mag.*, 1795, p. 1,019.

² *Ibid.*, July 20, 1795.

⁴ *Ibid.*, July 27, 1795.

⁶ *Leeds Intelligencer*, August 3, 1795.

⁸ *Ibid.*, November 9, 1795.

pared with 1750; bacon had risen from 6*d.* a pound to 9*d.*, and butter from 6*d.* to 1*s.* a pound.¹

Soaring prices and bitter resentment marked the early months of 1796. Wheat went up to 108*s.* a quarter in January and to 119*s.* in March. All kinds of remedies were suggested by the authorities. One thought that the situation might be improved if potatoes were accepted 'as a substitute for bread'.² An enthusiast for inclosures rejoiced in the fact that 'the high price of provisions, and the circumstances attending the late harvest have at length brought the administration to consent to the introduction of a bill for the inclosure of commons'.³ At the March Assizes in York the Castleford rioters were before the Court when the Serjeant took opportunity to say that they 'all lamented the scarcity of provisions, but that it was the duty of us all to submit to it with patience and resignation as the act of providence'.⁴ Naturally, he refrained from adding that it was easier for people in his position to manifest these wishes, but he mistook official incompetence for an act of God. If bread be lacking, small wonder that patience should be found wanting. Sir Nath. Grose was equally out of touch with reality at the Hereford Assizes in April; he dilated on the acts of violence in seizing foodstuffs; such violence was a capital offence and without any excuse; but 'the rich are compelled to relieve the poor. So long as a rich man has a loaf of bread, the poor man, for his subsistence, is entitled to a share of it'; his ignorance of what was going on shows in his pious comment 'that it is not in the nature of an Englishman to suffer a fellow-creature to perish for want when it is in his power to relieve'.⁵

The food situation improved in some degree from May, 1796, when wheat sold at less than 86*s.* per quarter, to the summer of 1799, when the price began to take wings again. By the November in that year wheat had stepped up to 114*s.* a quarter.⁶ The unpleasant fact was due, according to the Bishop of Durham, to 'a long series of wet and unseasonable weather'; to mitigate the sufferings among the poor during the coming winter, he advocated the adoption of 'speedy and effectual measures'.⁷ In Birmingham at the beginning of December the civic authorities put schemes in hand: soup 'at 1*d.* per quart, with a slice of

¹ *Gent's. Mag.*, 1795, p. 1,021.

³ *Leeds Intelligencer*, January 18, 1796.

⁶ *Ibid.*, April 11, 1796.

⁷ *York Courant*, November 18, 1799.

² *Ibid.*, 1796, p. 313.

⁴ *Ibid.*, March 21, 1796.

⁶ *Gent's. Mag.*, 1799, p. 1,007.

bread' was regularly provided; more than fifty-two thousand quarts of soup had been served in the previous winter.¹ A similar hand-to-mouth affair 'for the relief of the indigent and necessitous poor' had been introduced in York. Manchester served soup to the measure of 4,458 quarts.² The York Benevolent Society, in the Annual Report, remarked on the 'real misery' among the 'afflicted Poor' caused by 'the dearness of provisions'.³

The soup kitchens in York were still lively at the beginning of 1800; although costing 3d. a quart to make, the soup was being sold at 1d. A school was also started by a group of ladies to teach girls the art of knitting, sewing, reading and spinning; some thirty girls attended these classes; because of 'the pooriness of their ordinary food at home' and the fact that they did not often have 'one good meal a day', they were given breakfast at the institute every morning; a very few of the girls knew 'what a regular and plentiful meal' was, so 'the expense of their breakfast' was 'proportionately more considerable'.⁴ A committee of the House of Commons was appointed to consider the scarcity of bread; the report urged that while 'all charity and parochial relief should be given as far as practicable', it should always be afforded 'in any other article, except bread, flour and money'.⁵

According to the *Leeds Intelligencer*, more than eight thousand quarts of soup were provided for the poor in Leeds during the early part of January. 'The poor at Nunnington, in consequence of the high price of bread corn, have voluntarily come forward and expressed their willingness to use barley in their families, instead of wheat and rye'.⁶ Curiously, ten clergymen at Manchester saw 'divinity shaping the ends' of famine; like Job's flint-hearted comforters, they regarded it as 'one of the judgements of the Almighty sent to punish and reclaim a wicked and impenitent people'. The famished must have been fearfully wicked; since the punishment impoverished their very blood.⁷ Even the House of Lords debated the national situation and decided 'that in consequence of the high price and deficient supply of wheat and other grain' it was necessary to reduce consumption; to encourage others, their Lordships agreed to provide an example in their own establishments by cutting

¹ *York Courant*, December 2, 1799.

² *Ibid.*, December 23, 1799.

³ *Ibid.*, February 24, 1800.

⁴ *Leeds Intelligencer*, January 20, 1800.

⁵ *Ibid.*, December 30, 1799.

⁶ *Ibid.*, January 20, 1800.

⁷ January 13, 1800.

down the use of wheaten bread.¹ A further report of the committee of the Lower House on high prices gave emphasis to the need to reduce consumption; poor comfort for the starving poor, barely able to keep body and soul together; but the suggestion was more acceptable that relief should 'neither' be given 'in money nor in the sort of bread usually consumed', 'but in some other wholesome substitute'.² The idea of 'a judicious and diminished consumption' was given wide publicity by the King's Proclamation advising 'the greatest Economies and Frugality in the use of every species of grain'.³

Chill penury prevented the poor from the exercise of any further frugality. A public meeting in Sand Hutton in the North Riding called 'for the purpose of taking into consideration the present state of the labouring poor in their township . . . unanimously agreed that on account of the very high price of Corn, they were unable to supply their families with bread'.⁴ Other towns and villages were in that plight; charity liberally bestowed and constantly enlarged proved to be the merest palliative. The century closed with clouds in the sky and a general destitution in the land.

¹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, March 10, 1800.

² *Ibid.*, November 24, 1800.

³ *Ibid.*, December 8, 1800. *York Courant*, all December, 1800. *H.O.*, 42, 55.

⁴ *York Courant*, December 8, 1800.

CHAPTER III

COSTLY DEFEATS

THE treatment meted out to the common people by the rulers of eighteenth-century England is one of the saddest and most tragic chapters in our social history. Economic conditions, created mostly by the masters of industry, the merchants, the ministers of the State, were utilized from time to time to starve, stunt and stifle the lives of multitudes. That is a blunt assertion, but the proof is there in plenty. Helpless children, often not more than five or six years of age, were forced to work in mills and factories sometimes twelve to thirteen hours on end, their wages a mere pittance. Boys and girls were taken in thousands out of work-houses; under the guise and pretence of being apprentices, they were sold like slaves in many instances to employers as labour fodder from which to extract and exact profits. Young women, as well as tiny youngsters, were employed in the depths of the earth to win coal; they toiled their flesh and beauty away in darkness and danger, in pain and peril; they were the bitter roots from which the luxury of wealth burgeoned; if they gave voice or action to their discontents, the brand of the criminal was fixed upon them and they were cast into prison, transported across the seas, perhaps ruthlessly executed. Obnoxious regulations fastened shackles upon them; in a sense, and a cruel sense, they lived in legal chains. The laws punishing them, the prisons confining them, the judges condemning them were in every case the creation of the powers above them, of industry, commerce, and State. Without amenities, without the apparatus of seemly protest, without Parliamentary representatives, possessing no free Press nor any machinery for ventilating grievances in an orderly manner, the labouring sections of the community, the toiling masses, were under the necessity of wearing their lives away for a meagre existence to which no grace and no comfort of elementary justice were added, nor any tithe of real freedom allowed. Baffled, beaten, brutalized, finally defeated: it is a tragedy of waste and tears, a tragedy the half of which has never been told. That such could be in an age in which the brilliance of writers like Pope and Defoe, Addison and Fielding, Burke and Sheridan, shone in the literary firmament, and statesmen like Walpole, the two Pitts, and Charles James

Fox in the political, is an antithesis most remarkable at so late a date. The evidence is irrefutable, indisputable, inescapable, and the odd thing is that it derives and flows for the most part from aristocratic and plutocratic sources, Mammon uttering judgement on itself.

In the year 1740, foodstuffs being in meagre supply, cereals being exported, prices rising, discontent raging, the labouring classes suffered a plague of human misery; with their patience at breaking point and their behaviour surly and angry and passing into passions of violence, no amelioration came in the shape of cheaper and ampler supplies of the staff of life; instead, the authorities called out the soldiers, armed many civilians, arrested most of the ringleaders, sent several to the gallows.

During the riot lasting four days in April, 1740, at Dewsbury, the local magistrates, Sir John Kaye and Captain Burton, were restlessly active. Sir John sought to pacify by fair words and smooth and by a show of reason (much set by in the eighteenth century), but the gallant Captain preferred fisticuffs; he took the gloves off and strove to fell the rioters. One John Pollard thought of a fiercer way. Providing himself with firearms, he greeted the lawbreakers with 'hail shot' from a place of concealment. Some of the wounded were placed in confinement and the criminals, as they were adjudged, were banished. Nobody thought of banishing, or even diminishing, the economic injustices.¹

Instead of punishing the corn-factors, guilty of the trouble at Stockton, the magistrates positively aided and abetted by calling out the military and organizing the posse; with a force of more than two thousand men, they made war on the rioters, easily defeating them, capturing some, of whom a few were released by angry confederates. The newspapers tell that William Young, Hannah Moore, and Ann Willy were sentenced to be transported for seven years to South America.²

No excuse could be afforded for the wanton destruction of the Guildhall at Newcastle and the burning of the records on June 26; but apparently nothing was done to the gentleman who took the law into his own brutal hands and killed one of the unarmed demonstrators; nor was anything said in condemnation of corn-factors who diddled the defenceless keelmen and colliers by promising to reduce the price of corn and closing down their establishments instead. Of course, the sanctity of the law was

¹ S.P., 36, 50 and 53.

² *Daily Post*, August 14, 1740.

invoked against the rioters and forty of them were flung into prison; ordered to provide securities of impossible amounts for good behaviour in the future, several were kept in confinement for a long term, and six were ordered to be transported.¹

'The Gentry and the Richer Sort of Traders' at Wisbech, in order to stop the riots on June 29, hired some five hundred mercenaries, marched them to Upwell, 'the chief rendezvous of the Rioters', fastened about sixty of the rebels 'in Irons', eventually casting them into the filth of a bishop's gaol. Fourteen of them were sentenced to death at the trial, which harsh sentence brought a sense of regret to certain of the gentry. The Lords of the Council² were besought to 'soften by mercy' 'the extreme Rigour of the Law'; 'the thoughts of so severe an Execution already fill with Horror . . . the innocent inhabitants of this place'. Even the Lords in London were moved to exercise compassion, and eventually 'Robert Peyson, John Murton, Peter Freckington, Wm. Robinson, John Twiddy, John Vincent, John Rowland, Arthur Simmons, Robert Cooke, Rd. Blankley, John Bailes & Henry Dawson' were set free from the death sentence and sent abroad for fourteen years. William Origner and Thomas Ashton, otherwise Higgins, were left for a time under the original doom, but afterwards transported.³

The defeat of the rioters at Norwich was easily accomplished. After the mob began to demonstrate, 'an unthinking gentleman' took a 'Musket out the hands of a Dragoon and shot a man thro' the head'. Fight being shown, the soldiers immediately fired. The results of that night's work were that 'three Men, a Boy and two Women were shot', several being dangerously wounded.⁴ Reporting to the State Secretary, the Mayor of the City admitted that force had been used against force by 'which means 5 persons were killed'.⁵ The *London Daily Post and General Advertiser* reported that the soldiers, after exhorting the rioters to disperse, 'fired upon them, killed six upon the spot, and dangerously wounded several more, two of which are since dead of their wounds'.⁶ As no public inquiry was instituted, the sacrifice of human life must have been regarded as

¹ *Daily Post*, August 21, 1740. *Gent's Mag.*, 1740, p. 355.

² They were officially described as the Lords Council. All petitions, appeals, and reports were considered by them and their verdict was final. They were in miniature a modern 'Cabinet'. The number attending might be anything from eight to fourteen. The Archbishop of Canterbury was a member and attended regularly.

³ *S.P.*, 36. 52. *Ipswich Journal*, September 13, 1740. *Craftsman*, August 23, 1740.

⁴ *Ipswich Journal*, July 26, 1740.

⁵ *S.P.*, 36, 51.

⁶ July 22, 1740.

a lawful proceeding, but if the deaths had been aristocratic a different opinion might have been held.

The angry miners of Kingswood began to show discontent over the high price of provisions; they marched to Bristol; the Mayor informed the Duke of Newcastle that Colonel Leighton was ready to render the military assistance, but was not quite certain that he should act on the order of the magistrates; that doubt was soon removed by an express instruction from the Lords Council requiring him 'to repel Force with Force in case of necessity'.¹ The power to use the military was instantly applied, and 'a Piquet Guard' 'with Powder and Ball for several Discharges' was put on guard both day and night; the miners were frightened by the display of military might and returned to their homes.²

In the battle continuing eight days for the defence of the toll gates at Bristol in the summer of 1749, civic gentlemen were repeatedly assisted by 'a body of seamen, well arm'd with musquets, pistols, and cutlasses', together with a number of Commissioners, their staffs, and some constables; in addition were at least six troops of Dragoon Guards. With such armed array, 'an excursion into Somersetshire' was made, 'one of the rioters at Blackwell' being arrested and brought back to Bedminster, 'pinioned behind' a servant. Easy for the Commissioners, constables, and seamen with cutlasses to run 'with eager speed to attack the levellers', knocking down several, injuring many, and taking some into custody. Perhaps little courage was required for 'Councillor Elton, on horseback with his sword drawn' to stand in front of the infuriated crowd 'exhorting the people . . . to disperse'.³ But in fact the toll gates had to be removed nearer the city, though a number of rioters paid for it in prison. Two, however, were discharged at Salisbury, the jury refusing to convict. Believing 'it was in vain to try any more', the King's Council caused the others to be removed to Taunton, where English justice was more in chime with class distinctions; two culprits had been condemned to death in that town and were executed at Ivelchester.⁴

In a legal battle between the miners of Kingswood and the gentlemen of Bristol, the former might have won but for the action of the Attorney-General. Parading in the streets of Bristol, some colliers were fired upon by a few shopkeepers, one

¹ *S.P.*, 36, 52.

³ *Gent's. Mag.*, 1749, pp. 376-7.

² *Daily Post*, September 30, 1740.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1750, pp. 184-6.

person being killed. At the inquest John Bricknall, woollen draper, John Chivers, baker, and Michael Miller, jeweller, were charged with murder. Much perturbed by this verdict, the Mayor, Aldermen, and others appealed to the State Secretary for a *nolle prosequi*. At the same time another inquest was arranged by the local gentry; on learning this, the colliers threatened to ask for a third. Dr. Ryder, the Attorney-General, ended the dispute by granting a *nolle prosequi*, not only to those already charged, but also to any others who might be indicted.¹

A body of armed civilians was enlisted to fight against a band of angry peasants at Harewood Bridge in the early part of June, 1753. Receiving word that rioters were on their way to attack the toll houses and turnpike gates, Mr. Lascelles prepared a surprise by equipping his servants and tenants. Several peasants were wounded and carried off to prison.² When the gates of Dives were threatened with destruction in the neighbourhood of Beeston in the West Riding, the military was called out; it was said that 'the soldiers behaved with the utmost mildness', but 'several persons were killed' and others severely wounded.³

To make sure that somebody was punished for the riot that took place in Nottingham toward the end of May, 1756, Edward West and Thomas Jackson were kept in confinement for a time, though 'no direct charge' was preferred, not even 'so much as once entering the mills'. Evidence was brought against Thomas James, a 'stocking Weaver'. According to report he had been caught 'taking up in his Hands Two pieces of broken Milestones', exclaiming to his comrades, 'This is what cements the Stones together and they grind it with Flower, and we eat it as bread'. Such conduct, in the austere mind of Lord Holderness, constituted a serious 'Crime' which might 'amount to High Treason'; praising the magistrates for their diligence in the affair, he urged them to refuse bail to the prisoners.⁴

Propertied justice was swift to act in the Nuneaton riots of 1756; four of the rioters were arrested on the Friday, sentenced to death on the Saturday, ordered to be executed on the following Monday, though only two of them suffered the extreme penalty. Such expedition, exclaimed one of the reporters, 'has so terrified them' that 'they are pretty well dispersed'. Explaining to the State Secretary why he had reprieved Thomas Knight senior and Thomas Knight junior, Judge Willes added: 'I hanged ye other two, and promised them, yt. if ye rioters

¹ S.P., 36, 122.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 136.

dispersed immediately, & committed no more outrages, I would apply to ye King to pardon these two.'¹ In addition to the two men reprieved, four were kept as hostages to ensure good behaviour in the future; if this were not a sufficient deterrent, the noble Judge declared that 'every Person who shall be taken up and committed, shall be executed the Day after he is found guilty'.² The threat worked; in a few days the rioters returned to their homes. But victory for authority was not so easy at Sheffield in the hectic days, August 24 to 26 in the same year. The enraged mob put to flight a number of armed gentlemen, and the military, assisted by a band of cutlers, was needed to redress the balance. The rioters were fired upon; several were wounded, thirty-five taken prisoners.³

The bravely fearful gentlemen of Wellington and Broseley, not satisfied with suppressing the disorders in their own neighbourhood by means of a combined force of two thousand five hundred 'all pretty well armed', supplicated for a special commission to guarantee swift, summary and severe punishment on those arrested. Strange to relate, their desire was not gratified, but they gloated no doubt over the fact that ten captives were sentenced to death; Judge Willes felt uneasy over the savage sentences; immediately, he sought an interview with the King in order to make retribution less harsh; he suggested transportation; writing to Lord Holderness on the affair, he confessed that 'ye executions of so many would have exercised a general uneasiness in the County, & might have been attended with bad consequences'.⁴

A ruthless attempt to quell the disturbances was made at Hexham on March 7, 1761; a company of the Yorkshire Militia was brought into action and more than a hundred colliers were among the killed and wounded in demonstrating against the new Militia Act. Describing the affair, one of the local gentry wrote: 'What a horrible scene was beheld afterwards. Some were carried away in carts, others on horses. Many were led along just dying of their wounds, and all covered with blood. . . . Twenty wounded were carried to one house, eight of whom are since dead. . . . There are sixteen also lying dead in the church to be owned.'⁵ According to another report, Major Crow, 'who commanded the Militia' was 'much commended for his

¹ *S.P.*, 36, 135.

² *Public Advertiser*, August 26, 1756.

³ *Ibid.*, September 1, 1756.

⁴ *S.P.*, 36, 137.

⁵ *London Chronicle*, March 14-17, 1761.

gallantry, as well as his humane behaviour on this occasion'.¹

Signs of milder treatment for working-class offenders began to be observed in the course of the year 1765. The Attorney-General, Mr. C. Yorke, requested to send a special commission to try the Bulcamp rioters, flatly refused, declaring that their crime did not amount to treason, but was only 'a misdemeanour by an enormous Riot, highly aggravated in the Circumstances'. A similar verdict was given in the case of the Nacton Heath disturbance.² The gentler mood showed itself in judgements given by local magistrates; six of the Nacton Heath rioters were sentenced to one month only, with a fine of 40s. each.³ Fifteen of those arrested in the Bulcamp riot had to serve a comparatively short term of two months in gaol, with fines of 20s. each; the rest were discharged forthwith.⁴

In other localities aristocratic austerity shut the gates on mercy. A few angry peasants from Banbury, smarting under a sense of injustice, went to Walkworth to assert what they believed to be their legal rights by pulling down posts, rails, and fences, newly erected on the enclosed lands of Mr. Eyres. A party of local gentry rose from a sumptuous feast, saddled horses, 'rode full gallop' at the rioters; 'by riding over them', they 'broke their disposition'. Six of the ringleaders were apprehended, and a dignitary of the Church, one Archdeacon Grey, committed the lot to Northampton Gaol.⁵

To quell various disturbances in the autumn of 1766 traditional methods employed by the ruling classes were brought into play. At Beckington in Somerset a man and a boy were killed by the miller endeavouring to defend his property; several of the assailants were wounded; no charge was laid by the law against the militant miller.⁶ During the Norwich riot in the last week of September 'the principal inhabitants armed themselves with quarter staves, engaged the mob, took twenty-eight prisoners, and put the rest to flight. . . . Upwards of five hundred of the inhabitants patrolled the streets for two nights.'⁷ In the second encounter with the rioters, 'many were that night dragged by the enraged Citizens to prison'.⁸ The Marlow mob went to Maidenhead after a riot of four days in Marlow and its precincts

¹ *London Chronicle*, March, 14-17, 1761. *Gent's. Mag.*, 1761, p. 138. ² *S.P.*, 7, 4.

³ *Lloyd's Evening Post*, March 24-26, 1766. ⁴ *Ibid.*, March 26-28, 1766.

⁵ *London Chronicle*, September 10-12, 1765.

⁶ *Ibid.*, September 23-25, 1766. *Lloyd's Evening Post*, September 26-29, 1766.

⁷ *Lloyd's Evening Post*, October 1-3, 1766. ⁸ *Ibid.*, October 3-6, 1766.

and 'the town's people rose upon them; and after a short conflict, in which, some blood was spilt . . . the rioters were worsted, and seven or eight of them . . . were made prisoners'.¹ During the disturbance near Derby, thirty-four of the rioters were arrested, and all of them were taken away 'in a carriage pinioned'.²

Kidderminster reported eight persons killed by soldiers engaged in quelling a riot there.³ By the end of October, over sixty rioters were in Gloucester Gaol and more than four hundred fled the country.⁴ A later report put the number of prisoners in Gloucester at ninety-six, sixteen of whom were women.⁵ About forty-two were imprisoned in Salisbury Gaol; many were in prison at Norwich, Derby and Reading. Scant mercy was shown to these unfortunates. Addressing the Grand Jury at Norwich, Sir Henry Gould, the appointed Judge, expressed great surprise that 'a licentious rabble, in open defiance and contempt of those laws, under which they enjoyed all the privileges of freeborn Englishmen, should destroy the property of their fellow subjects'. Such outrageous conduct was most ungrateful in view of the 'parental tenderness' shown by the King in removing the bounty on exported corn.

Ten rioters were sentenced to death at Norwich, fifteen at Salisbury, nine at Gloucester, and five at Reading; several were transported; some kept in prison, others discharged. Six of the ten under sentence of death at Norwich were reprieved and three at Reading on the condition that they were banished from the country. The pronouncing of the death sentence on the Gloucester prisoners created a 'most affecting scene'. 'The Wives and Relations of the unhappy Rioters' with 'tears and Entreaties' waited outside the gaol 'imploring mercy round the Judges Carriages as their Lordships set off'.⁶ Three of the malefactors were executed on the second Friday in January, 1767. 'The poor wretches', said one of the observers, 'were so ill and weak' that it was thought they could not live to see the fatal day. One of them, Steven Cratchley, had been convicted of 'carrying a horn, which he blew to collect the mob'.⁷ The other six of the convicted were duly reprieved and reserved for transportation, five for life.⁸

¹ *Lloyd's Evening Post*, October 6-8, 1766.

³ *Ibid.*, October 8-10, 1766.

⁵ *Ibid.*, December 15-17, 1766.

⁶ *St. James's Chronicle*, December 23-25, 1766. *Lloyd's Evening Post*, December 5-8, 15-17, 19-22, 1766.

⁷ *London Chronicle*, January 6-8, 13-15, 1767.

² *Ibid.*, October 10-13, 1766.

⁴ *Ibid.*, October 27-29, 1766.

⁸ *Ibid.*, March 31-April 2, 1767.

Austere justice, property-minded, took its wonted course in 1772. Lord Rochford, writing to the clerk to the magistrates at Colchester, recommended the local justices 'to use their utmost endeavours to stop these riots and to be as expeditious as possible in seizing some of the people concerned'. In correspondence with the Rev. Tindall, one of the magistrates at Chelmsford, concerning the riots in that town, he advises him and his brethren to establish peace 'by early example'. 'The largest mob', he declares, 'will run away from a few soldiers.'¹ He rebuked the cleric for mixing and mingling charity with judgment.

To the magistrates of Sussex at Lewes in the June of 1778, some extra help was guaranteed by raising the Militia for the purpose of suppressing 'all Riots and Disorders, and to bring to Justice all Persons whatsoever that have been, or may be concerned therein'.² In the same months troops were sent to Nottingham to quench the fire of unrest. Soldiers had a busy time in similar endeavours in Lancashire during 1779. Two thousand rioters attacked a building near Chorley on the first Sunday in October; two of them were killed, eight wounded and taken to prison. Fearing violence in Preston, Captain Thompson of Colonel White's Regiment brought a hundred recruits to the town and offered to arm three hundred 'respectable housekeepers'; the offer was accepted immediately; troops were also sent to Manchester and Chorley.

In the Gordon Riots of 1780 vengeance from above was meted out. According to one report, one hundred and thirty-four rioters were tried at Middlesex and Southwark Courts on the capital charge, fifty-eight were sentenced, twenty-six actually executed.³ Among those who suffered the extreme penalty were a boy and a girl, each under seventeen years of age. The girl, confessed an observer, went through the proceedings 'in the greatest distress of mind'. More than ten thousand spectators watched the sad spectacle and saw English justice with no strain and quality of mercy in it.⁴ Over twelve thousand attended the executions at Tower Hill when two women and a boy of seventeen were put to death. The lad cried bitterly through all the moments of that tragic pilgrimage.⁵ Others were slaughtered 'by the necessary Interpolation by the Military'. Thirty-three were killed in that way on Thursday, June 8,

¹ *S.P.*, 37, 9.

² *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴ *Ibid.*, August 8-10, 1780.

³ *London Evening Post*, August 12-15, 1780.

⁵ *York Courant*, July 18, 1780.

'19 at the bank, 6 at Holborn, 5 in Fleet Market, and 3 at Blackfriars Bridge'.¹ Thirty-six were carried to St. Bartholomew's Hospital suffering from wounds; eight died.²

Severity, though on a smaller scale, was tried at Bath. One of the crowd was killed by the civic officers, another was executed and he 'was almost insensible' when brought to the gallows 'and it was thought he would not have lived to receive his punishment'. Pleading innocence to the last, he was attended in the cart by his two brothers, 'each supporting by turns, his drooping head upon the fraternal bosom, manifesting throughout the acutest sorrow'.³

Various measures to defeat the disturbers of the peace were taken by the authorities in 1783. Steven Barlow was executed in Staffordshire for taking a leading part in an affair at Etruria on Monday, March 10. The *York Courant* expressed the hope that 'the fate of this unhappy man' would be 'a warning to those deluded People, who daringly assemble in Defiance of the Law against Rioting'.⁴ At Ludlow on April 12 'a most daring riot by a Body of Clee Hill Colliers' provided an excuse for the local gentlemen to form themselves into a defensive association.⁵ In riots near Huddersfield fourteen of the mob were taken into custody; three, Mark Saltonstall, Thomas Spencer, and Esther Taylor receiving sentence of death. Ultimately Esther was reprieved, but the two men were hanged on Beacon Hill, near Halifax.⁶ One was fifty-six years of age, the other only nineteen. The hope was expressed 'that the many thousands who were spectators of this melancholy exit of their countrymen' would be 'so impressed by it as to make them determine never to associate in a tumultuous or riotous manner for the future'.⁷

In the last decade of the century, repression remained vindictive. Take the case of the Sheffield rioters charged with breaking down some newly erected fences on the enclosure at Stannington and Hallam; the Judge declared that 'the Government of the country required that no mercy should be shown'

¹ *London Evening Post*, June 8-10, 1780.

² *Ibid.*, June 10-13. *York Courant*, June 20. S.P., 37, 21. According to Horace Walpole (*Letters*, in six vols.), '210 persons were killed and 248 wounded, of whom seventy-five died in the hospitals' (vol. 6, p. 87). Among those executed, seventeen were 'under 18 years of age, and three not quite fifteen' (*Journal of the Reign of King George the Third, from the years 1771 to 1782*, vol. 2, August, 1780, p. 424).

³ *London Evening Post*, August 29-31, August 31-September 2, 1780.

⁴ March 25, 1783.

⁵ H.O., 42, 2.

⁶ *York Courant*, August 12, 1783.

⁷ *Leeds Intelligencer*, August 19, 1783.

to the prisoners, and one of them paid the life penalty at York.¹

At the York Assizes in March, 1793, two other rioters were sentenced to death for association with a disturbance in Whitby. Protesting his innocence on the day it was decreed he should die, William Atkinson, an old man of seventy years, declared he never had any intention 'of aiding in the above Riot', alleging 'that the Expressions he made use of were the effect of Liquor'. Hannah Hobson, sentenced to death at the same time, was given a respite 'during his Majesty's pleasure'.²

At Bristol on September 30 in the same year the toll-houses were attacked by a crowd of four or five thousand. The Hereford Militia was called out to assist the civil authority. 'Mr. Noble, one of the Aldermen of the City, with the Officers of the Regiment, headed the troops and marched down to the Bridge.' The soldiers, ordered to fire by the magistrates, did so 'in three different Directions'. 'The dead Bodies were carried about the Streets on Hand-Barrows, for a considerable Time. . . . There are supposed to be killed and wounded about 40.' 'The mob continued all Sunday. Last night the Militia was ordered out again, and 70 Persons were killed and wounded.'³

Concerned to preserve the peace during 1794, local authorities in the West Riding organized defence corps in various towns. At a meeting of the clergy, gentlemen, yeomen, and 'substantial Inhabitants' held for the purpose of forming an association at Pontefract like those at Leeds, Halifax, and Bradford, it was unanimously agreed that a defence corps should be created to guard against invasion and assist the magistrates in 'the Suppression of any Riots and Tumults that may arise'.⁴

In 1795 a most degrading drama unfolded. Two of the Oxford Militia were shot for their part in the Sussex riot; the unfortunate men were doomed to die in front of more than three thousand soldiers drawn up in grim array to witness the scene; twelve of the comrades of the condemned men, associated with them in the riot, were compelled to fire the fatal shots.⁵ Commenting at the York Assizes on the Sussex riot, Judge Lawrence asserted that 'such excesses in this kingdom admitted of no palliation. No one in this country would want so long as the wealth of the nation could assist him.'⁶ Chief Justice

¹ *York Courant*, September 6, 1791. *Leeds Intelligencer*, August 23, 1791.

² *York Courant*, April 15, 1793. *Leeds Intelligencer*, April 1, 1793.

³ *York Courant*, October 7, 1793. *Leeds Intelligencer*, October 7, 1793.

⁴ *York Courant*, May 26, 1794.

⁵ *Ibid.*, June 22, 1795.

⁶ *Ibid.*, July 27, 1795.

Kenyon, addressing the Grand Jury at the Summer Assizes in Worcester, recommended the powers that be in case of a riot 'to collect the strongest force (the Posse Comitatus and any other) and speedily crush it'. 'Necessity', he argued, 'in case of riot, not only justifies, but calls for military aid.'¹ Rochdale appears to have obeyed; a riotous mob was fired upon 'and two elderly men killed'.² A week later the same sort of thing was reported from near Leicester; at least four people were killed and eight wounded.³ In contrast, Castleford rioters were treated mildly at York Assizes, two being sentenced to a month in gaol, though reminded by Justice Clayton that they might have been charged with a capital offence.⁴

Suppression of the Naval Mutiny at the Nore in 1797 took drastic and savage shape. Several hundred mutineers were arrested; most of their ringleaders were put to death.⁵ In the year following, 'the substantial inhabitants' of the West Riding continued to be active in organizing defence corps.⁶ Still another judge expressed his mind with merciless force and emphasis. Trying a number of rioters at the Summer Assizes in Nottingham, he dubbed their conduct as being 'a species of Treason' and insisted that the offenders should promise to have nothing to do with civic disorders in the future. On their reluctance to promise, he threatened to despatch them to Botany Bay. Extracting the promise under duress, the Judge ordered them each to provide sureties of £500 to keep the peace for seven years.⁷ Judicial mildness was shown at the Wakefield Quarter Sessions in January, 1800. Martha Bray, Emma Holland, and Abraham Broadbent, having been convicted of being associated with the Huddersfield riot on November 19 in the previous year, were given a surprisingly short term in gaol, first-named twelve months, the others only three. But the Chairman of the Bench could not refrain from the reminder that they might have been on a capital charge.⁸

Another method frequently followed by the working classes in the eighteenth century to improve their standard of life was that of industrial association; it was trade union action. Less violent, of course, than rioting and commandeering, they soon

¹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, August 3, 1795.

² *Ibid.*, August 10. *York Courant*, August 10, 1795.

³ *York Courant*, August 17, 1795.

⁴ *Ibid.*, March 21, 1796. *Leeds Intelligencer*, March 21, 1796.

⁵ *York Courant*, July 10, 1797.

⁶ *Ibid.*, April 23, 1798.

⁷ *Leeds Intelligencer*, August 6, 1798.

⁸ *Ibid.*, January 27, 1800.

found that the law was sternly set against them. Six thousand keelmen at Newcastle-on-Tyne in 1750 refused to work because the masters wanted them to load more cauldrons of coal for the wages fixed; 'the magistrates proceeded against them'. The strike lasted at least seven weeks 'without doing any mischief', but sixteen of the agitators were cast into prison. Under the threat that 'hundreds more will soon be sent there', the keelmen returned to work on the terms they had rejected.¹ In 1751 journeymen tailors in London were sent to gaol for a like offence.² The Spitalfields weavers did better; again and again they combined to increase wages, and their pressure compelled the masters to accept the fixing of wages by local magistrates. This trade union success was but local and temporary; in the majority of cases, the combination of workers was visited by repressive measures on the part of employers and magistrates. Strikers in Nottingham in June, 1783, paraded their grievances, and 'several persons were fired at . . . and dangerously wounded'.³ In February, 1785, eight journeymen joiners at the Quarter Sessions in Liverpool were ordered to pay £10 each within ten days 'for combining to raise wages'. The alternative open to them was to go to prison for at least twenty days.⁴ At the April Sessions another six were fined a similar amount 'or to be imprisoned twenty days in the common gaol, and during that time to be fed upon bread and water only'.⁵ For a like offence, five journeymen joiners of Darlington were cast into Durham Gaol without the option of a fine.⁶

With the rapid development of industry toward the end of the century, and the consequent segregation of workmen, combining together became more frequent and usual, but repressive measures continued to be applied. To break the strike of shoemakers in London in February, 1792, one hundred and seventy warrants were issued by the magistrates at Bow Street, and 'twenty-one of the principals . . . were committed to Newgate six weeks'.⁷ A few months later cordwainers in Nottingham were found guilty of 'combination and conspiracy against their masters'.⁸ A number of warrants having been issued against some colliers in the neighbourhood of Leeds, 'a notable mob immediately got together and prevented the Constable and

¹ *Norwich Mercury*, May 5, 1750. *Gent's. Mag.*, 1750, p. 233.

² *Norwich Mercury*, October 26, 1751.

⁴ *Ibid.*, February 8, 1785.

⁵ *Ibid.*, April 12, 1785.

⁶ *Ibid.*, October 15, 1792.

³ *Leeds Intelligencer*, July 8, 1783.

⁵ *Ibid.*, May 10, 1785.

⁷ *Ibid.*, February 27, 1792.

other assistants from apprehending them'. Eventually two of the ringleaders were arrested and lodged in the Castle Gaol at York. 'Infatuated men!' exclaims the Editor of the *Leeds Intelligencer*, 'to join in such tumultuous acts', which 'bring ruin and misery upon themselves, their wives and their families'.¹

Pressure became more severe against resorting together. On February 25, 1799, two shoemakers, J. Hammond and J. Webb were brought before the King's Bench charged with the offence of 'a conspiracy to advance wages'. Counsel for the prosecution declared that 'the real question before the Court was, *Whether the masters were to be under the control of the Journeymen*'. The result was a foregone conclusion; Lord Kenyon avowed that the evidence 'had proved a conspiracy of the most dangerous nature, and which must be put an end to'. Having learned that some of the masters had shown a mistaken and perhaps mischievous sympathy by raising the wages of their workmen, his Lordship remarked most sternly 'that by giving these advanced prices they subjected themselves to a criminal prosecution, and, if found guilty, they would meet with a punishment much more severe than the journeymen'.²

As masters and magistrates already had power to suppress associations of workmen, further legislation seemed unnecessary, but in fact fresh legislation was introduced; a Bill to prevent Unlawful Combinations was passed before the end of 1799 and amended in 1800. In January, 1800, shoemakers were charged before the King's Bench with trade union activity. Mr. Erskine, with spurious sympathy, took up their defence, but confessed he had nothing to say in their behalf. The proceedings were a mere formality. Pronouncing them guilty of running a trade union club in the name of a friendly society, Justice Grose declared 'they had been convicted of a very bad offence'; hoping that 'this abominable Club' had now 'ceased to exist', he ordered them to be confined in Newgate Gaol for nine months.³

At the Summer Assizes in Chelmsford in 1800, John Little, Thomas Crisp, and Joseph Perry were charged with 'assembling in the parish of Steeple in a riotous manner, in the month of June last, and for exciting and promoting an insurrection and conspiracy to compel all farmers in Dingley Hundred to raise the price of wages in husbandry'. 'Aware of the serious con-

¹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, October 22, 1792.

² *Ibid.*, February 25, 1799.

³ *Ibid.*, February 17, 1800.

sequences of a riot and conspiracy of this nature', the Rev. H. B. Dudley, local magistrate, a representative of squirearchy in the Established Church,¹ had taken 'an active part in directing the apprehension of the rioters, and in the subsequent prosecution'. His brethren on the Bench thought the case so serious 'as to involve in it the general interest and welfare of the country at large'. It was disclosed that these simple-hearted workers 'had prevailed upon several labourers to leave their work, and join their party'. Justice Kenyon 'expatiated largely upon the heinousness of the offence, and declared that it bordered upon High Treason, being little short of raising troops and levying war against the King, and the Government of the country'. The sentence of twelve months in the county gaol appeared to be less austere than the words themselves.²

The necessitous poor, carrying the burdens they did, fenced in by the law, persecuted and punished in almost every direction, goaded and gaoled, having no regular work, paid the most meagre wages when they did, receiving no assistance when out of work, pressed on every side by the problem of the cost of living, forced into pauperdom, left by a selfish aristocracy to fend for themselves and almost blamed for doing it, had these alternatives, starving to death or stealing. Statistics relating to the former course cannot be had; undoubtedly a very large number of the penurious chose the latter course. To appropriate another man's property without his consent was almost the greatest crime any poor person could commit in eighteenth-century England. Most severe penalties were imposed if it were done.

No complete picture has been given, perhaps cannot be given, of the tragic and overflowing measure of human suffering inflicted upon the poor by so-called English justice in punishing offences against property; stealing, robbery and kindred crimes brought down upon the perpetrators a most cruel wrath. A few facts garnered from research can bear witness to the tortures and tribulations deriving from the criminal law. At Chelmsford Assizes in the spring of 1740 twelve offenders were sentenced to death, the majority being convicted of theft and robbery; all but two of them were executed.³ On May 31 over eighty criminals were sent to plantations in America; the total was

¹ See *Methodism and the Working Class Movements, 1800-1850*, by the present writer, pp. 37-8.

² *Leeds Intelligencer*, August 18, 1800.

³ *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, March 10, 1740.

considerably augmented by others from Southwark Gaol. At the Summer Assizes at Bridgwater thirteen were sentenced to death; eleven at Chelmsford; three of the condemned at Bridgwater were supposed to have bad records and they were put to further humiliation: Milliard to be hanged 'in chains on Bedminster Down, and York and Masters on Besseldon Common'.¹ The death decree fell on fifteen in the Woburn Circuit and on nine in the Northern, but transportation, a living death, was substituted.

A study of the frequent petitions sent to the State Secretary from the various gaols is illuminating. On September 9, 1740, Isabel Hutchings, a mere girl of eighteen, 'a sick and miserable Prisoner at Newgate', pleaded for remission of sentence of transportation 'for stealing a Piece of Printed Linen Value 4s. 10d.' No record of any reply is to be found; it can be assumed that the appeal was rejected.²

On Wednesday, March 11, 1741, the Recorder of London presented his usual report to the Lords Council concerning the convicts recently sentenced to death at Old Bailey. His Majesty was pleased to order twenty to be put to death, ten to be transported.³ Throngs of spectators watched the seven carts in sad and rumbling procession conveying the wretched to their doom. A month later, 'a hundred convicts . . . from Kent, Essex, Hertford, and other adjacent Counties' were conducted 'under a strong guard from the new Gaol in Southwark to the Waterside, and there shipped for his Majesty's Plantations'.⁴ On Thursday, September 17, four executions took place at Tyburn, a woman among them. 'Elizabeth Hardy . . . expected the same fate, but a Reprieve for Transportation for her was brought on Tuesday night. She had suffered a great deal whilst in the Gaol, having been brought to bed the first day of the Sessions there, of a child, which died a few hours after, and in that Miserable Condition . . . carried down to the Sessions House three Days after, when she took her trial, and was found guilty.'⁵ Petitioning for reprieve she confessed she was only nineteen, a stranger in London, forsaken by her husband; desperate and despairing, she had been tempted to steal; she entered a dwelling house, took money and goods to the value of 13s. 6d. For this first offence she was condemned to Tyburn Tree; reprieved at the last moment, she

¹ *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, August 26, 1740.

² *S.P.*, 36, 53.

³ *Daily Post*, March 12, 1741. *Gent's Mag.*, 1741, p. 161.

⁴ *Daily Post*, April 20, 1741.

⁵ *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, September 17, 1741.

was sent to America for fourteen years.¹ Another woman, a mother of five, was less fortunate. Upon Hannah Nobes the capital sentence fell for stealing from a shop to the value of 5s.; she appealed for a reprieve, but the cold-hearted Judge, with words of ice, declared there was nothing 'to justify the act of mercy', as the prisoner had been charged with theft to the value of 5s. on some previous occasion. But later the prison authorities found she was pregnant, and reprieve was granted for a time.² For robbery on the highways, a lad of eighteen was sentenced to death; a petition for reprieve carried twenty-one influential signatures, but made no difference. John Dale of Abingdon received the same sentence; the Mayor, supported by the Vicar, the schoolmaster, and twenty-three others, made it clear to the Lords Council that John Dale had been 'induced to commit the said Robbery, through excess of Poverty, to which he and his family were reduced by misfortune in his Trade as a Shoemaker'; the prisoner was transported.³

Death sentences were meted in plenteous measure in 1742. Serjeant Urling, the London Recorder, made his customary report on January 8. Of the eighteen offenders whose names and crimes were stated, 'His Majesty was pleased to order the twelve first for execution'; among the number were 'James Dugriois, and Joseph Allen for robbing Charles Wills on the Highway, and taking 2s. 6d. in Silver and other things'; in addition were 'Samuel Shuffle and Joseph Laycock, for robbing Mr. James Grey, on the King's Highway, of a pair of Silver Buckles'. In due time the twelve, five women among them, were hanged.⁴ At the Bedford Assizes in March four persons were deemed worthy of death; one was William Ramsden, convicted of sheep-stealing; his mother, brother, and sister were put on the transportation list for a similar offence. In the year before William Ramsden's father and another brother had been transported.⁵ Five offenders were sentenced to death at Bristol, two mere boys, one only fifteen years of age.⁶ Ten prisoners were sentenced to death at Gloucester, eight at Guildford, seven at Bury St. Edmunds and Salisbury, six at Dorchester and Maidstone, five at Thetford, twelve at the two Assizes at Worcester, six at the Summer Assizes at Newcastle, the same number at Hereford, ten at Gloucester and ten to be transported. A man, Bright, 'was so weak at the place of execution

¹ S.P., 36, 56. ² *Ibid.*, 55. ³ *Ibid.*, 59. ⁴ *Daily Post*, January 8, 1742.

⁵ *The Craftsman and Country Journal*, March 20, 1742. ⁶ *Daily Post*, March 30, 1742.

that he was forced to be held up by three men whilst the Executioner was performing his office'.¹ Throughout the year London gave Tyburn Tree a human crop; the Recorder reported that nineteen were ordered to death and others transported. But a correspondent of the *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, January 8, 1743, asserted that 'Robberies were never more frequent, or Rogues more plentiful . . . than at present'. 'There never were known', declares the *Weekly Miscellany*, 'such numbers of Thieves about Town as at present, not a night passing without something or other being stolen.' Send them to the Tree or send them over the sea seemed to be the answer. The *Daily Post*, March 25, reported that the Lords Council had ordered another fifteen London felons to be executed; in addition, six were transported, four for fourteen years, two for life; two months later five more were sent to the gallows, two, Elizabeth Cannon and Ann Ellard, servant girls, 'For robbing Mr. Bates of a considerable Sum of Money and Wearing'. That same day, 'being the First Sitzings at the Guildhall after Term, the Lord Chief Justice Lee and Willes, with the Serjeants at Law and Council, were splendidly entertained at Salter Hall by Mr. Sheriff Engleton'.² Surrey at the Summer Assizes sent eight to death and four to suffer transportation for fourteen years.³ Mere boys were hurried to death on paltry charges. A lad of thirteen years was sentenced to death at Bury St. Edmunds in July, but a reprieve was granted and he was banished instead. A lad at Exeter, doomed to die,⁴ was visited by John Wesley, who wrote in his *Journal*, August 28, 'the lad, who was to die the next day . . . appeared deeply affected while we were speaking, and yet more during our prayer. And no sooner were we gone than he broke out into a bitter cry.' Another youth, Richard Fralden, twenty years old, was sentenced to death at the Kent Assizes; appealing for mercy, he made known the fact that his offence consisted in 'taking 1s. 3d. from a person on the King's High Road' and had 'happened in great distress'; he pleaded with the State Secretary that transportation and not the grave might be the penalty.⁵

In February, 1744, ten prisoners were executed at Tyburn; eighty-eight were sent to America, thirty-five being women.⁶ Two lads were sentenced to death in September at the Old

¹ *Daily Post*, August 26, 1742.

² *S.P.*, 36, 60.

³ *Morning Advertiser*, August 10-12, 1743.

⁴ *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, August 8, 1743.

⁵ *S.P.*, 36, 62.

⁶ *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, February 18, 1747.

Bailey; they were charged with 'knocking down and robbing Henry Jones of 5s. in West Smithfield'; on account of their ages, one fifteen, the other thirteen, they were sent not to the gallows, but across the sea.¹ Another youngster, 'for putting a pistol at the breast of the wife of T. Pennington & robbing her of 7s.' got the death sentence.² Further boatloads of criminals were ready to sail in October; the human cargoes came from the gaols of York, Castleford, Nottingham, Horsham, and Leicester, some from Newgate; of the eighty-five females in that pitiful company of seafarers only seven of them were 'more than 18 years of Age'; it was decreed that they should not return to their native coasts for fourteen years.³

And yet, in spite of sentences excessive in cruel harshness, the number of street offences continued to increase in London; the City Council became much concerned and on October 15 appealed to the King for help; his Majesty immediately and graciously ordered six of the Newgate convicts to be hastened to the Tree, among them 'Anne Grayson and Anne Wells sentenced to death for robbing Mr. William Hamilton of 12s. 6d. at a house in Black Boy Alley . . . Anne Duck, for robbing Mr. George Chester of 4d. on the Highway'.⁴

Thus did the dignity of justice operate in the next few years. Six unfortunates heard the death-decreeing verdict at Chelmsford Spring Assizes in 1745, among them 'Thomas Stratton for robbing Stephen Smith of 2s. 6d. on the highway', but he, with the rest, suffered the agonies of transportation.⁵

The Old Bailey held to its grim reputation in 1745, 1746, 1747. A typical example was provided on Saturday, August 2, 1746, when eighteen were executed. In January, 1747, ten others were put by the Lords Council to the same fate, among them being 'Barney Linsey, a Boy about 16 years of Age'. At the June Sessions John Cooke was sentenced to death 'for robbing Mary Simms and Anne White on the Highway . . . one of a shilling, and the other of Three Half Pence'.⁶ About a month later Robert Aldridge made appeal to the Lords Council for the release of his boy of fourteen, who had been ordered overseas for stealing a brass pot from an alehouse.⁷ Robert Pritchard

¹ *London Evening Post*, September 27, 1744.

² *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, September 17, 1744.

³ *Ibid.*, October 2, 1744. *New Weekly Miscellany*, October 5, 1744. *London Evening Post*, September 29–October 2, 1744.

⁴ *Ibid.*, November 1–3, 1744.

⁶ *New Weekly Miscellany*, June 6, 1747.

⁵ *Daily Post*, March 15, 1745.

⁷ *S.P.*, 36, 99.

supplicated the Duke of Bedford for transportation and not death for 'taking one shilling and a Knife valued at Twopence'; the prayer was granted.¹ On April 24, 1749, the aunt of a boy of sixteen besought the State Secretary to turn the capital sentence into transportation; the charge was the theft of eight pounds of butter.² A few months later a desperate and heart-broken mother tried to save her boy of eighteen doomed to die 'for robbery on the highway'. His father had died in Bedlam.³ In the early months of 1749 five women heard the capital sentence pronounced upon them at the Old Bailey, and only secured reprieve because they were in pregnancy.⁴ On Monday, July 10, twelve offenders were sentenced to death, but Anthony Dunn, a boy of fourteen, indicted for highway robbery, 'dy'd in gaol'.⁵ At the September Sessions nineteen were marked for the gallows, fifteen breathing their last there a month later.⁶

Judicial savagery went on through the next ten years, 1750 to 1760. The Old Bailey enhanced its tragical traditions as with a tyrant's pride. A cynic might have been justified in saying that the place was the horrid vestibule to Hades. Among the eighteen branded for death at the April Sessions, 1750, were 'John Giddis and Henry Smith for robbing William Hudd of Two Pence Halfpenny in Pancras Fields'.⁷ At Newgate the gaol fever made the executioner's work less arduous, but the deadly infection smote four of the judges and forty members of the Bar, most of them dying. The fever, let it be said, was less partial than so-called justice.⁸ Condemning, hanging went merrily on. At the July Sessions, 'Ely Smith and Henry Webb' were sentenced to death 'for robbing Henry Smith . . . of a Hat and 1s'.⁹ On November 3 six Newgate malefactors were ordered by the Lords Council to be executed. 'John Pryer' was one of them; he suffered the supreme penalty 'for robbing James Book of 3s. 6d. and a Penknife on the Highway'; two others suffered likewise on the same charge, their names being 'Thomas Odell and Robert Burridge'. Robert Burridge was a lad of only sixteen summers, but neither his youth nor the anguished appeal of his mother could save him.¹⁰ How precious was human life! The arithmetic was ironical; three men were worth 3s. 6d. and a penknife! But Matthias Nicholls was auctioned, so to put it, at a cheaper rate; 'for robbing Thomas

¹ *S.P.*, 36, 108.

² *Ibid.*, 110.

³ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁵ *Gent's Mag.*, 1749, p. 329.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 474.

⁷ *Norwich Mercury*, April 28, 1750.

⁸ A. Griffiths, *The Chronicles of Newgate*, p. 438.

⁹ *Norwich Mercury*, July 7, 1750.

¹⁰ *S.P.*, 36, 115.

Foscue . . . of one shilling', he had to forfeit his existence on the earth.¹

But crime grew and grew. A writer, signing himself 'F. L.', suggested in the *Gentleman's Magazine* that castration instead of execution might stop the vicious growth. Women, he urged, should be banished the country at the very first offence.² The King published a Proclamation 'on account of the frequent robberies'; a reward of £100 was offered for every discovery of an offender.³ Later he appealed to both Houses to help him in his pruning; without hesitation, they promised to 'strengthen the laws for punishing and suppressing all such wicked practices';⁴ the promise began to be redeemed, for in five years a sum of £12,500 was spent by the Treasury in bringing criminals to justice: even bishops, blind to the Parable of the Lost Sheep, emphatically advised 'the Justices of Middlesex and Westminster', as well as judges going on their circuits '... to put the laws more effectually in Execution'.⁵ Royal, Parliamentary, and episcopal emphasis worked drastically. At Gloucester on Friday, April 13, 1753, 'Anne Williams was burnt at a Stake . . . for poisoning her husband', although she denied the fact right to the end.⁶ Of Susannah Burford a few months later these words were uttered by the Judge at Somerset Assizes: 'Let her be drawn on a Hurdle to the Place of Execution and there let her be burnt with Fire till she be dead'; but there was a prelude to all that; he ordered that the defenceless girl of nineteen be kept in a lonely cell till the day of her fiery death, being fed there on bread and water every day, and not allowed visitors.⁷ At the notorious Old Bailey on Monday, May 7, among eight sentenced to death was 'Nicholas Lawrence, for robbing John Field of 3s. 10d.',⁸ but he 'dy'd in the cells on Monday, May 28'.⁹ John Salisbury, sentenced to death 'for robbing Joseph Thompson in a certain house called the Turnpike House of Isleworth in Middlesex', was ordered to be exposed and hanged in chains near the turnpike upon Smalbury Green, the aggravation being that he had added assault to robbery.¹⁰ Philip Davis, sentenced to death at Bristol 'for robbing Edward Shiercliff of Two Shillings' on the Highway, was transported for fourteen years.¹¹ To the State Secretary it was reported on March 27, 1756, that George Robinson had been sentenced to death for robbing

¹ *Norwich Mercury*, November 3, 1750.

Gent's. Mag., 1750, p. 533.

² *Ibid.*, 1750, p. 569.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1751, pp. 511-513.

⁶ *S.P.*, 36, 153.

⁶ *Gent's. Mag.*, 1753, p. 198.

⁷ *Norwich Mercury*, September 1, 1753.

⁸ *Gent's. Mag.*, 1753, p. 245.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 1753, p. 246.

¹⁰ *S.P.*, 36, 118.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 128.

a certain woman of 6s. on the highway; the only evidence against him was that she had heard his voice in the dark, but that was sufficient to bring upon him the doom.¹ In a return giving the number of prisoners in Hertford Gaol on May 7, 1756, the case of 'Edward Newman' was mentioned; he was officially described as a 'labourer' aged thirteen, sentenced to death 'for stealing a pare of pumps and Buckles'.²

Long and cruel delays in carrying out sentences added the tortures of suspense to the weight of human suffering. Samuel Shefford, sentenced to death 'for robbing James Cobb and Catherine his Wife of Two Shillings and some half pence', was kept on tenterhooks from November 23, 1753, to April 24, 1754; during all that time he 'suffered Inexpressible Hardships and Miseries'; a very strong and moving appeal for remission of the sentence was made by a number of friends, inhabitants of Horsham, but the result is not to be found among the State Papers.³ An appeal was made for Michael Jordan, a youth of eighteen, gallows-doomed 'for cutting a Chain of Yarn on the Loom' at Shepton Mallet, and doing damage to the extent of 'one Shilling and Sixpence, or thereabouts'; not daring to ask for a free pardon, the inhabitants of the place pleaded that his life might be spared and that he should be reserved for transportation.⁴ The sentence of death was pronounced on two women for a street robbery 'to the amount of three shillings and two pence'; one of them was a mere lass of eighteen, an orphan, a first offender.⁵ 'For receiving two Hens knowing them to be stolen' was sufficient for Ann Farley to be banished from the country; at the Assizes in Worcester it was claimed that two men had taken 'the advantage of the insanity of her mind' to tempt and persuade her, but the evidence did not save her from dreadful exile.⁶ Among five sentenced to death at the Old Bailey on Saturday, September 16, 1758, was 'John Reed, for robbing Ann Odel of a pound of mutton and 6d.'⁷ In June, 1759, eight offenders were sentenced to death at the Hertford Assizes, but eventually they were transported; William Hammerton of Hertford was one of them; he was indicted 'for a Robbery on the Highway' of 'two Shillings and Sixpence'; also George Covey for 'Robbery on the Highway on Joseph Moon and taking from him Goods and Money to the value of Eight pence Farthing'.⁸ Thomas Rolfe was 'quite destitute of

¹ S.P., 36, 133.

² *Ibid.*, 134.

³ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁷ *Gent's Mag.*, 1758, p. 448.

⁸ S.P., 36, 142.

Money', 'not getting any Employ', 'and having a wife and large family starving at Home', he 'was driven into despair' and committed a robbery. But he had to die.¹ For stealing a cloak valued at 10*d.*, Susannah Harrold, aged fourteen, was sentenced to spend the next fourteen years of her life beyond the sea, though the only evidence against her was supplied by 'a loose, disorderly person'.²

The milk and honey of mercy began to flow for a period of time after 1760, but the measure was small and the pace laggard. The traditional thoughts, fears, alarms, and methods would intervene. Executions were not so numerous as in previous years, though capital sentence was not infrequent; in many cases it is clear that the transport ship of shame was substituted for the gibbet. But John Gibbons, for example, at the Chelmsford Assizes in 1760, was ordered to be hanged 'for Robberies on the Highway and taking goods and money Value tenpence halfpenny'; he was saved from this dreadful doom by being transported for fourteen years.³ At the Old Bailey, January 19 1761, three offenders were sentenced to death, one being 'John Irwin for assaulting John Jay, in Hyde Park and robbing him of 1*s.* 6*d.*'⁴ 'James Collins and James Whem' were executed in the autumn of 1762 'for robbing Sarah West in a field near Pancras Church of 2*s.* and a key'.⁵ Intensifying the degradation was a process that seemed to find favour; one method fairly common was to hang the victims of the law near the place of their crimes, leaving them as human scarecrows for several days; this having been done on the Edgware Road in April, 1763, a section of the populace showed resentment by cutting down 'all the Gibbets . . . where several Villains have hung in chains'.⁶ Mary Heald of Mere, near Knutsford, 'was condemned and burnt', having been 'first hung up to a post and strangled at Spital Broughton, nearly opposite the common gallows, on the north side of the great road'. The crime was that of poisoning her husband.⁷ On Wednesday, June 15, John Swift, fifteen years old, was executed at Tyburn 'on four capital indictments'; dying in company with four others, an observer confessed that his youth 'greatly excited compassion'.⁸ At the County Assizes fifty-three were marked for the gallows at ten of the courts; the Devon Assizes claimed fifteen and on the list was 'a lad 11 years

¹ *S.P.*, 36, 149.

² *Ibid.*, 150.

³ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁴ *Gent's. Mag.*, 1761, p. 43.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1762, pp. 446, 501.

⁶ *Leeds Intelligencer*, April 12, 1763.

⁷ *Ibid.*, May 3, 1763.

⁸ *Gent's. Mag.*, 1763, pp. 256, 312.

old, for setting fire to his Master's house'.¹ At the Ely Assizes 'a girl of 16 was capitally convicted of robbing her Master's house and setting it on fire, by which it was entirely consumed'.² On Friday, August 12, two malefactors were executed on Kennington Common, one of them 'William Braggar, a boy of 17, for robbing Mary Delaporte'.³

Approximately two hundred accused persons were sentenced to death in the course of 1764, the Old Bailey's share being at least forty-two. At twenty-two of the Spring Assizes, seventy-eight prisoners received the death sentence; among them 'George Williams, James Wilson and John Atkinson, for robbing on the Highway Wm. Roots & taking from him goods and Money Value 7s. 7d.'; two for stealing goods and money to the value of 6s.⁴ But a correspondent in the *St. James's Chronicle* of January 5 1764, describing himself as 'a Briton', wanted to be more severe, asserting that more criminals were executed in England than in any other country in Europe, but the practice of 'letting them glide so gently out of the world' was not sufficient and the worst of the offenders should be obliged to work for life 'on the Public Roads' 'chained Two and Two', or be put 'in such Manufactories as are prejudicial to the Health of poor Labourers', where 'in a few months they may lose their life, and more their limbs'. This specialist in the fine art of torture pleaded in vain; the authorities stuck to their old ways. Six citizens were sentenced to death at the Old Bailey on Saturday, April 12, 1766, one being 'John Bevan, a boy of 15, for robbing his Master's till'.⁵

In the Spring Assizes in that year more than one hundred and thirty-two prisoners came under the ominous shades of Hades; six others did so before Christmas, one 'John Winter, a lad of 15, for horse stealing'.⁶ Over one hundred and twenty-seven accused persons were convicted in seven circuits in the year 1768, but all escaped Tyburn for the wooden vessels which took them away, ten of them for life, the others for the habitual spell of fourteen years.⁷ What was the magic in the fourteen?

English justice for the distressed poor seemed to be just as savage as ever from 1770 to 1780. At the January Sessions of the Old Bailey in 1772 three unfortunates were sentenced to death, two were 'John Randall and William Ward' for 'robbing Elizabeth Tooth of 2s. in St. James's Park';⁸ but in due time

¹ *Gent's. Mag.*, 1763, p. 409.

³ *Ibid.*, 1763, p. 411.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1766, p. 599.

⁴ *S.P.*, 37, 3.

⁷ *S.P.*, 37, 6.

² *Ibid.*, 1763, p. 410.

⁵ *Gent's. Mag.*, 1766, p. 196.

⁸ *Norwich Mercury*, January 18, 1772.

they were reprieved and transported. A few weeks later seven malefactors, all in the flower of youth, were put to death at Tyburn: 'The oldest of them was not above 22 years of age.'¹ Describing the scene, an observer exclaimed, 'thus were seven young fellows brought to suffer in the bloom of their youth, whose ages altogether did not make seven score years'.² At the April Sessions, among the number sentenced to death was 'Peter McCloud (a boy of 14 years of age) for burglariously breaking into the dwelling house of Joseph Hankey, Esq. of Poplar, and stealing a brass window screw'.³ Ten other offenders received the fatal sentence at the July Sessions, three under the age of fourteen, and another under twenty.⁴ So numerous were the criminals retained in Newgate during this year that once again gaol fever broke out; it spread so rapidly that 'the infection was carried into court'; 'the unhappy wretches' in Newgate, said one reporter, 'were daily seized with the most alarming symptoms of that pestilential disorder'.⁵

Severe sentences thundered forth at County Assizes, twenty-seven being condemned to death in three of the courts; at Huntingdon, William Chapman received the capital sentence 'for robbing Henry Sherwood on the Highway of half a crown'.⁶

In the course of the next few years gaols were unusually full and the hangmen busy. At the January Sessions at the Old Bailey in 1773, John Lowe was sentenced to death for returning from transportation; he had been banished for selling a saddle believed to have been stolen and receiving a shilling for it; he 'must now die', said a sympathetic commentator, 'for the illegal receiving a single shilling'; his life was saved, a reprieve coming twenty-four hours before the time fixed for a rendezvous with death.⁷

In June, 1774, the following were ordered to be executed by the Lords Council, 'William Hawke, for robbing Charles Hart of 1s. 9d. in the road between Knightsbridge and Walham Green, John Charles for robbing Charles Errington on the highway of about a 2d., and William Jones, for stealing a quantity of Linen in the house of Mr. Hogg'.⁸ A boy of fifteen was sentenced to death at Cambridge for the really enormous crime

¹ *Daily Advertiser*, February 6, 1772.

² *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, February 7, 1772. ³ *Ibid.*, April 30, 1772.

⁴ *London Evening Post*, July 14, 16, 18, 1772.

⁵ *Ibid.*, November 12, 1772.

⁶ *Westminster Journal*, March 14, 1772.

⁷ *London Chronicle*, January 14, 1773. *Lloyd's Evening Post*, January 18, 1773.

⁸ *London Evening Post*, June 23, 1774.

of stealing thirty guineas.¹ At the January Sessions at the Old Bailey in 1775, 'William Morley' fell under sentence of death 'for robbing John Head, a farmer's boy, of sixpence on the highway at Enfield';² when the Recorder made his report to the Lords Council the answer came that William must be executed. 'John Brown, Thomas Free, and Thomas Pinkstone' suffered the same fate for 'robbing Peter Brown of 6s. in the fields near Sadler's Wells'.³ In the Guildhall, London, on Wednesday, February 15, 'a boy, not seven years old', described as 'the head of a gang of pickpockets about his own age', was tried before Alderman Thomas 'with picking a gentleman's pocket of a handkerchief'.⁴ 'Savage brutality' was almost at its worst when 'a young woman' 'naked to the waist' 'was whipped at the cart's tail from Spitalfields' Church through adjacent streets'; 'the young creature' gave vent to 'the most agonizing screams' 'whilst punishment' 'was inflicted on her back'; she 'had purloined four pounds of silk from the weaver who had employed her to wind it'.⁵

At the County Assizes in the spring of 1775 over one hundred and thirteen were sentenced to death; among them was 'William Clewer' at Coventry 'for robbing John Burton of 1s. in a field' near that city.⁶ In the June Sessions at the Old Bailey 'William Howard, aged 13' was sentenced to die 'for stealing a mare, the property of Mr. Thomas Wright at Hackney'.⁷ Nearly five months later 'John McGuire' received the same sentence 'for a highway robbery upon Wm. Ivers, and stealing 2s.'. ⁸ Another sentenced to death on the same occasion was 'John Knowles for robbing Robert Leigh on the highway of half a crown and a shilling'.⁹

Although the statistics for 1776 are somewhat incomplete, at least two hundred offenders heard the death doom at the Old Bailey and the County Assizes; at the former resort of justice, on Thursday, October 17, six citizens were to be offered to the gallows, including 'John Alexander and John Lambeth . . . for assaulting Thomas Ebrall, in the fields near the Duke of Bedford's private road, and robbing him of a shilling, a sixpence, and fourpence in halfpence'.¹⁰ At the Aylesbury Assizes in March, 1777, 'James Pace, a boy about 11 years old, was capitally convicted for horse-stealing', but was eventually

¹ *London Evening Post*, July 10, 1774.

² *Ibid.*, January 12, 1775.

³ *Ibid.*, February 2, 1775.

⁴ *Ibid.*, February 16, 1775.

⁵ *Ibid.*, March 4, 1775.

⁶ *Ibid.*, April 8, 1775.

⁷ *Ibid.*, June 3, 1775.

⁸ *Ibid.*, October 19, 1775.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, October 17, 1776.

pardoned on condition of serving His Majesty on board a man-of-war.¹ Two men were sentenced to death at Stafford for stealing on the highway a watch 'and one shilling in money'.² Among three executed at Tyburn in January, 1778, was 'William Pollard, for breaking into the house of Richard Longworth . . . and stealing a black cloak, and other things'. 'William Pollard . . . who was a youth about 19 years of age, was very much agitated on his way to the place of execution, and wept much.'³ A few weeks later John Rice was sentenced to death at the Old Bailey 'for burglariously breaking and entering the dwelling house of Henry Aston, with intent to commit felony therein'.⁴ Among the four executed at Tyburn at the end of October, 1779, were 'Isabella Condon, for coining shillings and sixpences; Margaret Creamer for robbing John Scarlett', and 'Wm. Chamberlain for stealing a letter from the General Post Office'. 'Immediately after the executioner fastened Isabella Condon to the Stake, where she was strangled to death, the faggots were lighted, and her body was consumed to ashes.' Margaret Creamer, a witness of the scene, 'wept bitterly before she was put to death'.⁵

During the decade 1780 to 1790 aristocratic justice appeared to increase in ferocity. More criminals were sentenced to death in these ten years and more were transported than in any other decade in the whole century. In the last three Sessions at the Old Bailey in 1780 at least thirty-two offenders were marked out for Tyburn; in the December victims were three boys, John Bailey, William Jacob, and Lawrence MacDermot: 'The oldest was scarcely turned sixteen', and Jacob was described as not 'much more than twelve years of age'. Another was a woman, Elizabeth Hayland by name, who 'seemed ready to expire, when the Recorder, from his great humanity, desired her to be seated'.⁶ Eleven were sentenced to death at the January Session in 1782; one 'was a boy about thirteen years of age'.⁷ At the next Sessions ten received the supreme sentence, one a blind boy accused of breaking into a house 'with intent to steal'.⁸ In his Speech to the House of Commons in December, 1782, the King referred to 'the great Excess to Which Crimes of Theft and Robbery' have grown; this excess 'called of late for a strict and severe execution of the Laws'.⁹ Human blood fed the

¹ *London Evening Post*, March 18, 1777. ² *Ibid.*, April 1, 1777. ³ *Ibid.*, January 22, 1778.

⁴ *Ibid.*, February 17, 1778.

⁵ *Leeds Intelligencer*, November 2, 1779.

⁶ *London Evening Post*, December 9, 1780.

⁷ *London Chronicle*, January 12, 1782.

⁸ *Ibid.*, February 26, 1782.

⁹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, December 10, 1782.

gallows still more profusely for additional laws were passed to ensure that the appetite of the gallows was more swiftly answered. In eight sessions at the Old Bailey in 1783 more than one hundred and forty were sentenced to death; also an equal number at the County Assizes. Everywhere the gaols were overcrowded. 'The present spring assizes', commented the *Leeds Intelligencer*,¹ 'presents us with a more melancholy picture of capital convictions than ever have been known at any former period.' The authorities had for years been making 'an unavailing slaughter of the lives of our fellow creatures'. At the Sussex Assizes 'George Eagleston' was condemned to death 'for stopping a Boy in the Parish of Framfield and robbing him of Two Shillings and Threepence Halfpenny'.² For an even smaller sum, Thomas Palmer received the same sentence at Suffolk Assizes for 'robbing Joseph Crowder on the highway of one Shilling'.³ Thirty-three were sentenced to death at the June Sessions at the Old Bailey, thirty-two at the September Sessions. The attitude of the law-makers and administrators was rather vividly expressed in the words of the Recorder at the Old Bailey on Monday, September 22; addressing the unfortunates who stood in the shadow of death, 'He exhorted them in the most earnest manner not to form any Expectations of Mercy on Earth, as Mercy to the Individual would be Cruelty to the Community'.⁴ He, Mr. Harrison by name, was congratulated by the Editor of the *Public Advertiser* for 'his humane and Pathetic Charge to the Unfortunate Convicts'.⁵

The Old Bailey's holocaust during 1784 exceeded that of the previous year; more than one hundred and fifty citizens fell under the direst judgement. At the April Sessions twenty-four, among them 'Patrick Burn, and Charles Barton, for Burglariously breaking and entering the Dwelling House of Dr. Delport . . . and stealing three Silver Tea Spoons'; also 'Isaac Torres, and William Smith, for . . . entering the Dwelling House of Thomas Barker, and stealing a Muslin Apron, a Cap, and other Things'.⁶ At the September Sessions, among the twenty-four death-sentenced were 'William Rellions and Robert Abell, for feloniously assaulting William Rough in Stepney-fields, and robbing him of 3s. and one penny'.⁷ The two were executed two months later. Five men at the December Sessions were

¹ April 8, 1783.² *Public Advertiser*, March 22, 1783. ³ *Ibid.*, March 26, 1783.⁴ *Ibid.*, September 22, 1783. *Gent's Mag.*, 1783, p. 802. ⁵ September 25, 1783.⁶ *Public Advertiser*, April 29, 1784.⁷ *Ibid.*, September 17, 1784.

doomed to die 'for feloniously assaulting Thomas Francis Silversmith, and Ann his wife, on the highway near Battlebridge, in the parish of St. Pancras . . . and taking from his person 2s. in money, three glass drops, a knife, and a rule'.¹ When Joseph Hulet, a lad of eighteen, was executed in November, he 'kicked and struggled surprisingly' for several minutes in front of a large crowd.²

The Old Bailey's victims in 1784 were very large in number, but the County Assizes surpassed the total. In fifteen assizes one hundred and seven people were sentenced to death.³

During 1784 the problem of transportation became acute; through the American War, the inflow of criminals almost ceased; many were retained in consequence in the hulks at Woolwich; one report reveals that out of two hundred and ten no less than thirty-eight were under the age of twenty-one; six were only nineteen, six eighteen, five seventeen, three fifteen, two under fourteen years of age.⁴ 'An Act for the Effectual Transportation of Felons and other offenders was passed by the House of Commons in 1784.' The first report of the working of the Act was a tragically terrible document; one thousand five hundred people were being transported annually from the homeland, but the gaols remained overcrowded. Whether the pathos of exiled youth appealed to the Solicitor-General or not, he had to confess 'that the third of the criminals in the kingdom sentenced to transportation are boys under seventeen years of age'.⁵

The year 1785 was probably the blackest in English judicial history; nearly five hundred were sentenced to death, many others sent across the seas. At thirty-one assizes at least two hundred and fifteen received the capital sentence; eighty-one were put to death, the rest banished.⁶ One hundred and fifty-two accused at the Old Bailey were told that their lives must be forfeited; on Wednesday, February 2, twenty were executed. 'It is truly lamentable', remarked a commentator in the public Press, 'that the safety, peace and good order of society should render the sacrifice of the lives of our fellow creatures . . . indispensably necessary.'⁷ How cheap lives were—cheap as dirt, as the saying is! Five hung on the Tree for taking a couple

¹ *Public Advertiser*, December 13, 1784.

² *Ibid.*, November 18, 1784.

³ *Tork Courant*, March 23, August 10, 17, 1784.

⁴ *H.O.*, 40, 2.

⁵ *Leeds Intelligencer*, March 30, 1784.

⁶ *Tork Courant*, April 12, 1785. *Public Advertiser*, April 15, 1785.

⁷ *Ibid.*, February 3, 1785.

of shillings from two persons and a few paltry possessions to boot!¹ Other convictions included 'John Johnson . . . and John Oliver, two boys, for feloniously assaulting John Briant Cecill on the highway, throwing him down, and robbing him of twelve pence, and a number of mutton pies, value 2s. 6d.'² Twenty-two were ordered to be executed in April and nineteen were actually put to death, three, of whom two were mere boys, having been reprieved at the last moment.³ Two other boys were sentenced to death but were reprieved in August, but during that month a brother and sister were executed together in London, the girl 'was not quite eighteen years of age; . . . she seemed insensible' just before the end came; brother and sister kissed each other several times, and 'went out of the world hand in hand'.⁴ Twenty-five folk were sentenced to death at the September Sessions, one 'James Mosdell, for feloniously assaulting Mary Warwick on the high road . . . and robbing her of one shilling, one counterfeit shilling, and some halfpence'.⁵ 'William Moore, for breaking and entering the dwelling-house of John Weedon, and stealing a shirt, a pair of stockings, &c.'⁶ Patrick Coffield for assaulting a person on the highway and taking 'a hat, and a black silk handkerchief'.⁷

Turn to the records provided by the County Assizes: 'John Smith and John Hall' sentenced to death at Northampton in July for 'robbing Joseph Johnson on the highway of a handkerchief, a knife, and fourpence';⁸ at Cambridge a boy named Peters, 'about 16 years of age, for burglariously entering the house of William Anderson . . . and stealing therefrom a silver spoon';⁹ at Bridgwater 'James Prig, aged 17', and also 'Thomas Rogers aged 19'; 'Thomas Woodham, aged 69', for 'robbing William Wiltshire of 1s. 6d. near Bath Easton'.¹⁰

Death sentences were not so high in 1786 as in the previous year, but still above the average; at the Old Bailey the number was not less than one hundred and seven as the harvest of seven sessions; five were executed in February, one was 'John Callahan, for robbing James Hayle on the highway at Saltpetre Bank, of an hat and an handkerchief'.¹¹ Seven others were put to death in June, Phœbe Harris among them, 'for feloniously and traitorously coining and counterfeiting the silver money of this

¹ *Public Advertiser*, December 13, 1784. ² *Ibid.*, February 28, 1785.

³ *Ibid.*, April 29, 1785. ⁴ *Ibid.*, August 19, 1785. ⁵ *Ibid.*, September 16, 1785.

⁶ *Ibid.*, September 20, 1785. ⁷ *Ibid.*, September 21, 1785.

⁸ *St. James's Chronicle*, July 12, 1785. ⁹ *Ibid.*, July 14, 1785.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, August 6, 1785. ¹¹ *General Evening Post*, February 14, 1786.

realm, called a shilling'. 'When she came out of prison, she appeared both languid and terrified', and when she caught sight of the apparatus for her punishment, it 'seemed to strike her mind with horror and consternation'. After she had been burnt 'the mob breathed nothing but execration upon the Police and the magistrates', and finally they 'amused themselves with kicking about her ashes'.¹ Edward Griffiths was executed on the same day 'for a robbery on the highway of James Ogden, Esq. and taking from him goods and money, value 2s. 6d.'²

'The Lent Assizes in 1786', according to one reporter, were 'marked with the circumstance of more criminals dying by the hand of the executioner than is recorded of any former period.'³ Upwards of one hundred and twenty at eleven assizes heard the doom of death; another forty listened to the dread dirge at eleven other assizes. At Gloucester, sixteen offenders being told to forfeit their lives, one fell on his knees crying out for mercy and saying, 'My Lord, pray spare my life. I am no more fit to die than you be.'⁴ Eight fell under the capital decree at Salisbury, one 'Mordecai Bollen for robbing Henry Sully of 2s. 5d. between Winsley and Gradford'.⁵ Among the executed at Leicester were two lads, nineteen and seventeen. 'These two unfortunate young men were nearly dead with the apprehension of their approaching fate, before they arrived at the fatal spot.'⁶ In addition, 'cartloads of convicts', said one authority, 'continue to be sent off . . . to the ships at Deptford, which are appointed to transport them to Botany Bay'.⁷ In round figures, one thousand eight hundred persons were being transported at this time, young people in large numbers; in a list of those on board the *Dunkirk* at least one hundred and thirty-eight out of a total of one hundred and seventy-one were under thirty, and thirty-two were under twenty-one; a youngster from Exeter was only ten years old.⁸

During 1787 more than two hundred offenders were sentenced to death at the various assizes. At the Lent Assizes at Warwick, Kingston, York, Salisbury, and Gloucester at least eighty-three were marked out for slaughter.⁹ At the Old Bailey the death-chimes continued to sound and resound; one hundred and

¹ *General Evening Post*, June 15, 20, 22, 1786. ² *Ibid.*, June 15, 1786.

³ *Ibid.*, April 11, 1786.

⁴ *Ibid.*, April 1. ⁵ *Leeds Intelligencer*, April 11, 1786.

⁶ *General Evening Post*, March 18, 1786.

⁷ *General Evening Post*, December 2, 1786.

⁸ *H.O.*, 42, 8, 9, 10.

⁹ *London Chronicle*, March 17–April 12, 1787.

twenty-five souls heard the knell in the course of the year; fourteen were executed on the last Wednesday in February, among them 'Frederick Daniel Lucas, Edward Ham, and Joseph Feay, for robbing James Sewell on the highway of a purse containing 2s.'; 'William Jones, Henry Staples, John Turner, for robbing James Pollard . . . of a silver watch'; 'Thomas Graves, for assaulting James McDonald, and taking from him a pocket book, a hat, &c.'; Feay and Graves got reprieve from the hangman, but they had to go to the sailing prison.¹ Sophia Pringle was executed that same day; she 'was so much affected as to be obliged to be brought out between two men, and was held up till turned off'.² In a report on twenty-one convicts to the Lords Council, fifteen were reserved for execution; they included 'William Dreyre, for feloniously and traitorously colouring a piece of base metal, to resemble a sixpence', 'John Davis for burglariously breaking and entering the dwelling-house of Metcalf Johnson and stealing a pair of leather shoes', and 'William Trapshaw, for burglariously breaking and entering the dwelling-house of James Linney . . . with intent to steal his goods'.³ Among four sentenced to death at the beginning of the Old Bailey Sessions on Thursday, July 12, was 'Thomas Alger for feloniously assaulting Mrs. Ann Attree on the highway . . . and robbing her of a purse containing one half crown piece and one shilling'.⁴ That month thirteen were put to death in London, one was 'Christopher Cousins (a boy under sixteen years of age), for assaulting Charles Earle on the highway, and taking from his person a cotton gown'.⁵

More than two hundred souls came to the sentence of death in the year 1788, the Old Bailey's claws and jaws claiming eighty-two. Of nine convicted at the January Sessions were 'Jacob Beltin for a burglary in the house of Sarah Goslin', and 'Robert Fosset for a burglary in the house of John Cock'; both 'were recommended to mercy on account of their age, Beltin being only sixteen, and Fosset thirteen'.⁶ The Recorder addressed the offenders: 'You have all been convicted of very merciful juries of crime to which the wisdom of the Legislature has annexed the punishment of death.'⁷ An example of those 'merciful juries' in 'the wisdom of the Legislature' was provided

¹ *Morning Chronicle*, February 10, 1787.

² *General Advertiser*, March 2, 1787.

³ *The London Packet, or New Lloyd's Evening Post*, April 20, 1787.

⁴ *Morning Chronicle*, July 12, 1787.

⁵ *London Chronicle*, July 3, 1787.

⁶ *Morning Chronicle*, January 10, 1788.

⁷ *Ibid.*, January 14, 1788.

at the Lent Assizes of Exeter, when seventeen offenders were sentenced to death; reporting the end of the Assizes, a correspondent wrote, 'and a bloody one it has been'.¹ Forty prisoners were brought to trial at the Worcester Lent Assizes, thirteen under twenty years of age; seven were condemned to die, one a youth of eighteen.² 'Merciful juries' at the Summer Assizes at Somerset decided that fifteen of the accused must go to the gallows, and 'John Jones, aged 13, for stealing a silver watch . . . and John Dyer, aged 18, for stealing a silver cup, a silver cream pot, and eight silver tea-spoons . . . were ordered to be transported for seven years'.³ As to the 'wisdom of the Legislature', ninety-six women besought Lord Sydney to mitigate their sentences; their offences, it was claimed, taken on the average, 'do not amount in value to more than the sum of five shillings for each person', but some among them had been sentenced to transportation for seven years, others for fourteen years, the rest for life; several had been 'locked up three years' in 'this loathsome prison, without beds, and with only bread and water to live upon'.⁴ It was an insensitive and adamant 'wisdom'! It was a heart of stone and not of flesh in Whitehall!

Conviction, transporting, executing went on; the Juggernaut moved along the King's highways. At the Old Bailey in 1789 over one hundred were sentenced to death; in the January Sessions, 'Edward Riley, for assaulting William Denton on the highway, and robbing him of a hat'; 'James Wharlton, for assaulting James Pack . . . and robbing him of some half pence, a handkerchief, and a knife', 'Jane Whiting, aged 14 and Mary Wade, aged 11, for assaulting Mary Philip, a child of seven years of age, in a privy near the Treasury, and robbing her of a frock, a tippet, and a cap', 'William Craddock, for feloniously assaulting Mary Ann Rowen, and taking from her an apron, an handkerchief', 'William Harper, for assaulting Mary Elton, and robbing her of a muff and a tippet'.⁵ At the February Sessions 'John Robley, for a burglary in the house of Richard Parliament, and stealing a child's hat and a gold band'.⁶ In the March, 'Christiana Murphy' was executed for 'counterfeiting diverse pieces of base metals so as to resemble shillings and sixpences'; not only was she executed, but also burnt at the stake.⁷ At the September Sessions, 'Joseph Hone

¹ *Morning Chronicle*, March 28, 1788.

² *Bristol Journal*, August 9, 1788.

³ *Ibid.*, January 15, 16, 1789.

⁴ *Ibid.*, March 19, 1789.

⁵ *Ibid.*, March 15, 1788.

⁶ *Morning Chronicle*, August 21, 1788.

⁷ *Ibid.*, February 26, 1789.

. . . for breaking open the house of Joseph Harris in the day time . . . and stealing goods, valued 4s.¹ received the death sentence. But '82 respites were pardoned on the condition of being transported to Botany Bay for the term of their natural lives, and 23 for the term of seven years'.² At the December Sessions no less than twenty-six were sentenced to death; among them were 'Elizabeth Bagnall . . . for violently assaulting Sarah Stocks on the highway, and robbing her of a silk handkerchief, valued three shillings', 'Thomas Morgan and James Smith, (two boys) one aged fourteen, the other twelve, for feloniously stealing . . . a piece of silk handkerchief'.³ Sternly speaking of 'the increasing depravity of the times' and the necessity of 'so many wretched criminals' being 'prematurely cut off from society', the London Recorder demanded of them 'not to indulge any hope of mercy'.⁴ Listening to these sentiments, 'the boys, eight in number, and the seven women presented a most dreadful spectacle . . . they continued several minutes at the Bar, some on their knees, filling the Court with their lamentations and cries for mercy'.⁵

It is true that the number of convictions, executions and transportations fell in the last decade of the century, but the melancholy figure remained far too high. Many of the offenders were extremely young. In the Lent Assizes of Warwick for 1790, nineteen prisoners were sentenced to death, eight under twenty-one; three were only nineteen, two eighteen, two sixteen; twenty-eight were cast for transportation, two at eighteen, one at seventeen, two at sixteen, and one barely thirteen.⁶ Mercy faintly whispered at the Old Bailey, when forty-nine capital convicts were brought to the Bar; instead of being put to death, 'his Majesty's clemency' commanded them 'to be transported to the East Part of New South Wales', forty-five for life, two for fourteen, two for seven years; what they thought of the Royal clemency was indicated by an outburst of shouting on the part of some of them on leaving the Court; 'Botany Bay for ever', they cried.⁷ Once again Warwick Assizes showed how to administer the austere aristocratic laws; in 1791 nine persons were sentenced to death, among them 'Elizabeth Smith (aged 19), Hannah Wainwright (aged 18), and Phoebe Healey

¹ *Woodfall's Register*, September 10, 1789.

² *General Evening Post*, September 19, 1789.

³ *Woodfall's Register*, December 10, 1789.

⁴ *Ibid.*, December 18, 1789.

⁶ *Leeds Intelligencer*, April 13, 1790.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Gent's. Mag.*, 1790, p. 1143.

(aged 20), for assaulting and robbing T. Smith in a house of ill fame at Birmingham'. Added to these were 'Anne Brooks (aged 19)', ordered to be transported for seven years 'for stealing wearing apparel', and her mother fourteen years 'for receiving the same'; ten others got seven years each, 'two of them aged thirteen, one fifteen and two seventeen'.¹ Of the eight executions at Newgate in July, two were 'Joseph Wood, aged 14, and Thomas Underwood, aged 15, for assaulting William Budle, a lad of 12 years of age, and robbing him'.²

The gallows were busy, the prison ships in full sail, and Lord Stormont contended that '*Our Constitution in its present form . . . was the most perfect, the most wise, and the most happy system of Government that ever the wisdom of man framed; its basis was natural justice*'.³ One of the bishops bore similar witness; he regarded it as 'that noblest work of human wisdom'.⁴ Mr. Justice Ashhurst, at the King's Bench, November 19, 1792, joined in the chorus of praise: 'There is no country where Law is more uprightly or more impartially administered.'⁵ From the voices and views of those condemned to death at the Warwick Assizes in the spring of 1793 might have come a truer verdict and appraisal. Among the nine bidden to forfeit their lives, some were very young: 'Wm. Goss, aged 17; J. Williams, aged 14, W. Jones, aged 15; G. Collins, aged 19 . . . J. Heaton aged 15; for different burglaries.' In addition, 'Anne Cooke for robbery, and Richard Palmer, aged 20, for forgery'.⁶ Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings a deeper and finer wisdom might have come.

Some of the official reports showed how 'the most perfect, the most wise' Constitution, with its 'most happy system of Government' based on 'natural justice' operated on the lives of criminals who escaped the gallows. In one selected period of six months, 'one hundred and thirty-two convicts' had died on three of the hulks alone. Duncan Campbell, engaged in shipping transports for at least twenty years, admitted that 'on an average of Seven Years' he had transported to Virginia and Maryland 'Four hundred and Seventy-three convicts annually . . . rather more than a Seventh Part of the Felons died, many of the Gaol Fever, but more of the Small Pox'.⁷ Those who succeeded in living were little better off than those who died.

¹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, April 5, 1791.

² *Ibid.*, July 12, 1791.

³ *Ibid.*, February 13, 1792.

⁴ *Ibid.*, August 13, 1792.

⁵ *Gent's. Mag.*, 1792, p. 1050.

⁶ *Leeds Intelligencer*, April 15, 1793.

⁷ *Report on Felons*, December 16, 1778, p. 17.

Campbell confessed that he sold 'common Male Convicts. . . for Ten Pounds apiece, Females at about Eight or nine Pounds; those who were of useful Trades, such as Carpenters and Blacksmiths, from Fifteen to Twenty-five pounds'.¹ After listening to this tragic story, the Government Committee apparently thought that the suffering imposed on these unfortunate victims was not severe enough; they finally decided 'that the sending atrocious criminals to unhealthy places, where their labour might be used, and their lives hazarded . . . may in some cases be advisable; and in the instance of Capital Respites is indisputably just'.² Later reports revealed that of the three hundred and fifty convicts transported in one boat to Africa in 1780, about twenty to thirty died on the way. Some of those who reached Africa were taken by the Portuguese and the remainder either escaped or died.³ In 1790, the Governor of New South Wales reported to Mr. Granville that 'of the 930 males sent by the last Ships, 261 died on board, and 50 have died since landing. The number of sick this day is 450; and many who are not reckoned as sick have barely strength to attend to themselves'.⁴ Three hundred and forty-seven died while another group of convicts were being transported. 'Many were almost dead on arrival, very few could stand and they had to be slung on shore like goods. Ten or twelve died every day after first landing.'⁵

Notwithstanding these evidences of 'natural justice', the law remained unaltered, the administrators unreformed, and petty

¹ *Report on Felons*, p. 16. Most of the convicts sent to America became 'indentured servants' or 'white slaves'. 'Upon arriving at an American port convicts were sold for seven, up to fourteen years to any one who wanted a servant or a farm hand.' 'Maryland was the only Colony that was not strongly opposed to receiving them, and there they were landed in large numbers. It has been authoritatively stated that from fifteen to twenty thousand convicts had entered Maryland before 1763.' 'The prices paid for white servants varied widely, but, as a rule, twenty pounds would buy a good bond servant with four or five years to serve. It was paid to the captain of the ship and was called "passage money".' 'George Washington had numerous indentured servants.' In 1774 'four convicts and a man and his wife had been purchased on his account. The four men had three years to serve, and the married couple four years. The sum paid was one hundred and ten pounds sterling . . . five and a half pounds a year for each one' (W. E. Woodward, *A New American History*, U.S.A., 1938, pp. 83, 84, 85).

² *Report on Felons*, December 16, 1778, p. 29.

³ *Report on the Working of the 1784 Act for the more effectual transport of Felons*, 1785, p. 17.

⁴ *Accounts and Papers relating to Convicts on Board the Hulks and those Transported to New South Wales*, p. 61.

⁵ William Dawes, R.M., 1762-1836, by his great-granddaughter, A. Currer-Jones (*Viva*), p. 6.

offences increased. Hundreds of citizens were sent to an early and humiliating death; hundreds of others barely escaping the hangman's rope were banished from their homeland, never to return. At the end of the century 'the most happy system of Government that ever the wisdom of man framed' could condemn a mere child to death for an offence of whose gravity it had no grasp. At the Chelmsford Assizes in 1800 'Harry Hunsden, a boy of eleven years of age' was sentenced to death for stealing 'various Bank notes out of the letters from the Post Office 'at Chelmsford'; 'Baron Hotham, in the most humane manner, informed him there was great reason to believe he would receive the Royal mercy. The little convict fainted away, and was supported in the Gaoler's arms, while sentence was passing upon him'.¹

The lower classes in the eighteenth century, really longing in their hearts to emancipate themselves from distress, want, and famine, were repressed, beaten, and defeated by those who ought to have been their guides, philosophers, and friends. The hungry sheep looked up and were not fed; instead they were sent to the slaughter.

¹ *Gent's. Mag.*, 1800, p. 270.

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¹ *Gent's. Mag.*, 1800, p. 270.

Section Two

THE GROWTH OF METHODISM

CHAPTER I

THE PURPOSE OF THE METHODISTS

THE term 'Methodist' in its modern sense was first regarded as a nickname and applied to a company of undergraduates resident at Oxford in the year 1729. Acting under the direction of Charles Wesley, at the time a student at the University, some of these young men began to take religion more seriously and attended the Holy Sacrament weekly at Christ Church. They agreed together [to observe with strict formality the method of study and practice laid down in the Statutes of the University].¹ One result of this undertaking was that they became more 'precise and regular—methodical—in their conduct, and in the disposing of their time'.²

John Wesley in 1729 was engaged as a curate in his father's parish, with special oversight of the Church at Wroote. Returning to Lincoln College on November 22 of that year to fulfil his obligations as a Fellow of the University, 'his age . . . character . . . and strong personality', as well as his position in the institution, 'made him the natural and inevitable leader of a society which was after his own heart'. Encouraged by John Wesley's influence, the young men began to rise early in the morning for their devotions, and they spent certain appointed evenings every week in joint reading especially in the Greek New Testament. Regarding religion as a serious business and a matter of great moment, they agreed to repeat 'a collect every day at stated hours', to engage in 'regular seasons of prayer', and to devote 'fixed times' for the study of the Scriptures and in 'definitely allocated works of charity'.³ Because of their systematical and orderly behaviour, they were dubbed 'Methodists', 'Sacramentarians', 'Enthusiasts', 'Bible Moths', 'the Godly Company', 'the Holy Club', and 'the Superogation Men'. Some

¹ Townsend, etc., *History of Methodism*, vol. 1, p. 139.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 142.

of these names in due time faded and fell away like leaves in *winter* autumn, but that of 'Methodist' remained.

The name 'Methodist' was next applied in 1737 to a number of people affected by the preaching of George Whitefield and encouraged by him to form themselves into a religious society. George Whitefield as an undergraduate had been a member of the Oxford Club, and it seemed to be in the natural order of things that those coming under his spell and influence should reveal some of the characteristics of the Oxford Methodists.

The name was also applied to the followers of the two Wesleys when they began to win adherents to their new method of preaching and practising the gospel. Disappointed with their ministry in America, these two brothers returned to England deeply perturbed in mind and soul. After many weeks of continued introspection, both found the peace and joy they had been seeking so long. They began to be more zealous in their preaching and more anxious to bring others to their own state of mind. Their enthusiasm (a quality the eighteenth century disliked and despised) was too much for the rather rigid, formal, and self-satisfied Churchmen of that time; one by one the State Churches closed their gates against them. Meanwhile George Whitefield suffered the same humiliation at Bristol. Not to be thwarted in the fulfilment of his Divinely appointed vocation, he tried the innovation of preaching in the open air. The effect was electrical. Thousands of poor people gathered to hear him. As a result of these outdoor meetings, religious societies were formed and preaching places appointed. John Wesley was invited to preach in the fields under the open sky. With much diffidence and not a little prejudice, he acceded to Whitefield's request. The results were so encouraging that Wesley saw in the success an evidence of the Divine sanction. Taking over the leadership of the societies left behind by Whitefield, he reorganized at least two of them and built a meeting house. During his periodic visits to London, he acquired a building called the Foundery and established a religious Society there. Additional Societies in due course were formed at Kingswood, Oxford, Newcastle, and other places, each and all of them adopting the name Methodist. As the number of Societies increased, it became ever more essential to define their purpose and regulate their conduct.

Like the original group at Oxford, the first and foremost purpose was personal, individualistic, spiritual. They harboured

no ulterior motive. They were brought into being for religious purposes, to enable every member in company and fellowship with others to work out his own individual salvation. The increase in the number of Societies and adherents and the growth of opposition, persecution, and misrepresentation from without made it imperative that their intentions should be expressed and their relations to Church and State defined.

From the beginning it was made clear what they did not want to do, and what they contemplated doing. It is no exaggeration to say that they did not want to form a new Church. They really desired 'to reform the nation and more especially the Church'.

That the Methodists did not intend 'to form a new sect' was stated with lucid emphasis over and over again. That was the position of John Wesley himself to the very end of his life; the majority of his followers were at one with him; the annual Conference of the Societies followed the founder's wish. Without doubt, John Wesley loved the communion of the Anglican Church; he enjoyed its liturgy, accepted the doctrines, believed the mode of government to be in harmony with the teaching of the New Testament. He never thought of providing a substitute for, or creating a rival to, that Church; nor did he contemplate a reform of its hierarchial system. Throughout the whole of his life he remained in association with the Established Church of England and constantly sought to bring others into communion with it. Again and again he declared his continued attachment and even devotion to it; his estrangement was only apparent and never real. Explaining the proceedings of the first Methodists at Oxford, he exclaimed, 'They were all zealous members of the Church of England; not only tenacious of all her doctrines . . . but of all her discipline to the meanest circumstance'.¹ Speaking of the decision he made in 1738 along with other clergymen 'to preach Bible Christianity', he maintained that 'they were hitherto perfectly regular in all things, and zealously attached to the Church of England'.² Prior to 1739, he possessed a strong prejudice against preaching in the open air and might never have essayed to do so if the Churches had not closed themselves against him. Writing a reply in his *Journal* on September 13, 1739, to the question of 'a serious clergyman' asking 'in what points' the Methodists 'differed from the Church of England', he gives the categorical answer,

¹ *Works*, vol. 8, p. 348.

² *Ibid.*, p. 349.

'In none'. 'The doctrines we preach', he said, 'are the doctrines of the Church of England; indeed the fundamental doctrines of the Church, clearly laid down, both in her prayers, articles and homilies.' When requested to say in what things they differed from other clergymen, he answered, 'In none from that part of the clergy who adhere to the doctrines of the Church'.¹ Although he organized religious Societies in different parts of the country, and arranged for them to meet weekly under the direction of leaders appointed by himself, he did not believe he was forming any new sect. There had been similar societies before his time; they continued to exist after he began his ministry; his *Journals* bear record that, at a meeting of a society in Aldersgate Street on May 24, 1738, he experienced a remarkable spiritual and emotional experience which Methodists ever since have called his conversion. There was never any question about the loyalty of these earlier societies to the Established Church; they existed solely for the improvement of the spiritual life of the individual members. Wesley no doubt intended the Societies he established to serve a like purpose. After six years of widespread evangelical activity and ever-increasing development, he summoned a Conference of his supporters in London. Six clergymen attended; their names are worth recording: John and Charles Wesley; John Hodges, rector of Wenvoe; John Meriton from the Isle of Man; Samuel Taylor, vicar of Quinton; and Henry Piers, vicar of Bexley. Four laymen were later called to the proceedings—namely, Thomas Richards, Thomas Maxfield, John Bennet and John Downes. On Wednesday, June 27, 'the Conference gave up the whole of the day to the consideration of the question of the relation of the Methodists to the Church of England'.² Among the many questions discussed were: '1. What is the Church of England?' '2. What is a member of the Church of England?' '3. What is it to be zealous for the Church?' '6. How shall we bear the most effectual testimony against that part of the clergy, who either preach or live contrary to the doctrine of the Church of England?' '7. How should we behave at a false or railing sermon?' '8. How far is it our duty to obey the Bishops?' 'Do we separate from the Church?' The members of the Conference were satisfied that the answer to the last question was an absolute negative. 'We hold communion therewith', they asserted, 'for conscience sake, by constant attending both the word

¹ *Works*, vol. 8, p. 349. ² J. S. Simon, *John Wesley and the Methodist Societies*, p. 210.

preached, and the sacraments administered therein.' When it was argued that they had already separated from the Church, they replied, 'Perhaps', if the critics meant themselves when speaking of the Church. 'It is sure we do herein separate from them, by maintaining the doctrine which they deny.' 'But do you not weaken the Church?' was also asked. 'No', was the reply. 'The congregation of English believers, we do not weaken at all.'

Other questions considered at the Conference were: 'Do not you entail a schism in the Church? Is it not probable that your hearers after your death will be scattered into all sects and parties? Or that they will form themselves into a distinct sect?' 'We believe notwithstanding either that they will be thrust out, or that they will leaven the whole Church.' 'We do, and will do, all we can to prevent those consequences which are supposed likely to happen after our death. . . . But we cannot with good conscience neglect the present opportunity of saving souls while we live, for fear of consequences which may possibly or probably happen after we are dead.'¹

Commenting on the prolonged discussion, J. S. Simon, a notable Methodist authority, declares 'that Wesley and his associates were aware that they were getting within sight of a possible separation from the Church of England'.²

How they endeavoured to prevent this eventuality is exemplified by the publication of the rules for the 'Band Societies'; all the members were required 'Carefully to attend all the Ordinances of God; in particular: 1. To be at Church and at the Lord's table every week, and at every public meeting of the bands'.³ That these rules were not ignored may be evidenced from the example of Thomas Willis, once described as 'an ornament of the Church of England, and of the Society in Kingswood'. Writing to John Wesley on November 13, 1744, he proclaimed his obedience to the rules of the society. 'I am at Church', he declared, 'or the place appointed to worship God several times in the week; and at every public meeting of the Bands, except anything extraordinary prevent; and I go to the Lord's Table once a month, in my own parish church, which is as often as it is administered there.'⁴

Although to remain inside the Church of England was the

¹ 'John Bennet's Copy of the *Minutes*', published in the *Wesley Historical Society Proceedings*, vol. 1.

² *John Wesley and the Methodist Societies*, p. 212.

³ *Works*, vol. 8, p. 274.

⁴ *Arminian Magazine*, 1778, p. 276.

avowed intent of the first Methodists, the bishops and clergy did their utmost to thrust them out. Not content with writing and preaching against them, some of the clergy organized and persuaded rude mobs to assault and violently oppose them. Fierce denunciations were often hurled at them when they attended the parish church. In some cases they were refused the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. 'Almost without exception', contended J. S. Simon, 'the Bishops were hostile to the work of the Wesleys and wished to end it.'¹ Some of the bishops, in circular letters and other forms of public print, warned their clergy against the contagion of the Methodist fanaticism. Bishop Lavington of Exeter went to the extreme when he likened the Methodists to the hated papists. Certain Methodist preachers, tired of constant railing and persecution by the clergy, began to demand separation from the Church, in spite of the decisions of the Conferences in 1746, 1747, and 1748. In 1746 the Conference discussed the questions: 'Should we insist on people's going to Church? Shall we set them an example at Bristol?' No indication of the reply to the first question is supplied by the Conference minutes, but in reference to the second they decided to make 'a trial of the effect of it, by going to St. James' every Wednesday and Friday'.² The theological red herring was drawn across their path when the members met for the 1747 Conference. They agreed eventually that they were not guilty of schism, 'no more than rebellion or murder'. When asked if they divided themselves from the Church of England, they replied with a definite 'No'. They still held communion with her and hoped to do so until the end of their days. At the Conference in 1748 the suggestion was considered that members should preach in as many places as possible without forming Societies, but it was asserted that the experiment had already been tried 'in a large tract of land from Newcastle to Berwick upon Tweed', with the result that 'almost all the seed had fallen as by the way side'.³

William Myles, an early Methodist historian, admits it was in 1751 that the 'disputes began in the Connexion respecting . . . union with the Church of England'. Three reasons were given for this. 'Many dissenters had been converted to God by the preaching of the Methodists. Some who were originally

¹ *John Wesley and the Methodist Societies*, p. 211.

² 'John Bennet's Copy of the *Minutes*', in the *Wesley Historical Society Proceedings*, vol. 1.

³ *Ibid.*

Church people changed their sentiments on account of the illiberal treatment they met with from some of the clergy of the Established Church. . . . Some of the preachers were rather intemperate in their zeal in pointing out the crimes of wicked ministers.’¹ Knowing something of the current of feeling running against the Church, Charles Wesley drew up in March, 1752, an agreement designed to prevent a possible separation. He succeeded in persuading his brother John, together with William Shent, John Jones, John Downes, and John Nelson, to sign it. In this document they jointly agreed to recognize that their ‘present call’ was ‘chiefly to the members of that Church wherein we have been brought up’, and that ‘by the Grace of God’ they would ‘never . . . leave the communion of the Church of England without the consent of all whose names are sub-joined’.²

The lawfulness and expediency of continuing with the Church were seriously discussed at the Conference of 1755. Luke Tyerman, the biographer of John Wesley, called 1755 the year of crisis. ‘The great question’, he contended, ‘was the necessity or propriety of the Methodists separating from the Established Church, and of the Methodist itinerant preachers administering the sacraments.’³ Referring to the matter in his *Journal*, John Wesley says: ‘Our Conference began at Leeds. The point on which we desired all our preachers to speak their minds at large was whether we ought to separate from the Church. Whatever was advanced on one side or the other, was seriously and calmly considered; and on the third day we were all fully agreed in that general conclusion, that (whether it was lawful or not) it was in no way expedient.’⁴

Replying to the Rev. S. Walker of Truro, who had written on the subject of separation, Wesley on September 24, 1755, confessed that ‘all . . . you say concerning the inexpediency of a separation from the Church, I readily allow; as likewise that the first and main question must be, “Is it lawful to separate?”’ Accordingly, this was debated first, and that at large, in seven or eight long conversations; And it was then only we could not agree concerning this, that we proceeded to weigh the expediency of it. As to the grounds on which those who plead

¹ W. Myles, *Chronological History of the Methodists*, 4th Edition, p. 72. J. S. Simon *Advance of Methodism*, p. 214.

² *J. Wesley's Journal*, Standard Ed., vol. 4, note 2, March 16, 1752. J. S. Simon, *Advance of Methodism*, p. 226.

³ *Life of John Wesley*, vol. 2, p. 200.

⁴ Tuesday, May 6, 1755.

for a separation from the Church proceed, some of them have weighed the point long and deeply. They have very particularly, and with earnest and continued prayer, considered the lawfulness of it. And they allow, "If it be lawful to abide therein, then it is not lawful to separate."¹ Luke Tyerman believed that the reply of Wesley to Walker proved 'three momentous facts': '1. That the Conference of 1755 could not come to an agreement as to the *lawfulness* of separating from the Church of England. 2. That the arguments used in favour of a separation were arguments which Wesley was not able to answer to his own satisfaction. 3. That rather than give up open-air preaching, extemporaneous prayer, forming Societies, and permitting men not episcopally ordained to preach, Wesley would wholly separate himself from the Established Church.'²

In the October, 1755, the Rev. Thomas Adams of Wintringham, replying to Wesley's request for advice on the subject of separation, suggested that he should openly declare himself against the separatists. 'As you are not satisfied in your conscience', says Adams, 'of the lawfulness of a separation in form; but on the contrary, have advanced many reasons against it, which seem weighty to yourself, and at the same time judge it to be inexpedient; methinks your way is plain before you. . . . If any considerable number of the Methodists should persist in carrying their design of a separation into execution, you and others, your present scruples subsisting, will be obliged in conscience to disavow and declare openly against it.'³

Wesley replied fifteen days later and said, 'I am still in my former sentiment. We will not go out; if we are thrust out, well. And of the same judgement are, I believe, at least, nineteen in twenty of our preachers, and an equal majority of our people. We are fully convinced that to separate from an established Church, is never lawful, but when it is of absolute necessity; and we do not see any such necessity yet. Therefore we have at present no thoughts of separation.'⁴

The matter was referred to again at the Conference in 1756, held at Bristol. Fifty persons were present. Tyerman, commenting on the discussions, confessed 'that separation from the Church of England was still the great question agitating the

¹ *Works*, vol. 13, p. 163.

² J. S. Simon, *Advance of Methodism*, p. 300. Tyerman, *Life of John Wesley*, vol. 2, p. 209.

³ *Arminian Magazine*, 1779, p. 372.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 374.

Methodist mind'.¹ Speaking of this Conference, John Wesley declared that he and his brother closed the proceedings 'by a solemn declaration of our purpose never to separate from the Church', adding, 'all our brethren cheerfully concurred therein'.²

Charles Wesley, a more tenacious Churchman than his brother John, strenuously opposed all the tendencies and thrusts towards separation. He was so annoyed at the sentiment expressed by some of the preachers at the Conference in 1755 that he is reported to have picked up his hat abruptly and left the building. In the summer of 1756 he got into touch with the Rev. Samuel Walker on the subject. Walker had written to John Wesley on the question, advising him to come closer to the Church. Between September and October, Charles Wesley went north in order 'that he might use his influence' to check 'the tendency to separation which was so strong in Lancashire, Yorkshire, and Northumberland'.³ Writing of Evesham in his *Journal* on Saturday, September 18, he says: 'I did not forget to confirm the brethren in their calling; that is, to live and die in the Church of England.' On Thursday, September 23, he visited Sheffield and writes: 'I spake plainly and lovingly to the Society of continuing in the Church; and though many of them were Dissenters and predestinarians, none were offended.'⁴ On Thursday, October 21, he was at Manchester and says of the Methodists there: 'Of all the members of the Church of England, the poor Methodists are the most exposed, because serious and therefore worth stealing.'⁵ He complains rather bitterly of the attitude of some of the preachers, one of them being guilty of 'talking in his *witty way* against the Church and Clergy'. Another, he avowed, '*could not* advise them to go to Church, for he never went himself'. In fact, 'he advised them *not* to go'. In view of this situation, Charles 'talked with the Leaders, and earnestly pressed them to set an example to the flock, by walking in all the commandments and ordinances'. Writing to his brother at this time, he suggested '*greater, much greater* deliberation and care in admitting Preachers'. He wondered whether the preachers, before being received, as such should be grounded 'not only in the doctrine we teach, but in the discipline also, particularly in the communion of the Church of England'.⁶ Writing again on October 22, he contended that experience

¹ *Life of John Wesley*, vol. 2, p. 244.

³ J. S. Simon, *Advance of Methodism*, p. 332.

⁵ *Ibid.*

² *Works*, vol. 13, p. 305.

⁴ *C. Wesley's Journal*.

⁶ *Ibid.*

taught him more and more 'that the Methodists can never prosper, or even stand their ground, unless they continue steadfast in the ordinances'.¹ Continuing his campaign against the tendencies toward separation, he wrote on October 26: 'After preaching I examined those of the most wavering classes, and persuaded all, except the Dissenters, to go back to church and sacrament.'² The next day he 'talked with more of the classes, and could only find two who would not take advice. . . . The rest, a few Dissenters excepted, determined to live and die with us in the communion of the Church of England.'³ Writing to the Rev. Grimshaw three days later, he asserted, 'I have once more persuaded them to go to church and sacrament, and stay to carry them thither the next Lord's Day'. 'Nothing but grace', he added, 'can keep our children from running into a thousand sects, a thousand errors. . . . Let us labour while we continue here, to ground and build them up in the Scriptures, and all the ordinances.'⁴ In a letter to the brethren at Leeds, he commented on the grief among the Sanballats and Tobiahs 'when they heard there was a man come to seek the welfare of the Church of England'. He besought them to 'continue in the old ship'.⁵

Charles Wesley ceased to be itinerant in 1757; his biographer, Thomas Jackson, confesses that 'the principal cause of his settlement in all probability was the state of feeling which existed in many of the Societies and preachers with regard to the national Church. He deemed it a matter of absolute duty that they should all remain in strict communion with her.'⁶ At the Conference of that year the preachers discussed the question of closer union with the Evangelical clergy; shortly after John Wesley wrote to Walker of Truro pointing out how impossible it would be to follow the latter's suggestion and hand over the Methodist preachers to the care of the parish ministers.

The question of leaving the Church was considered again at the Conference in 1758. John Wesley acknowledged that many of the Dissenters who had been recruited for Methodism were prejudiced against the Church; he desired, therefore, that the point be discussed, 'whether it was expedient for the Methodists to leave the Church. The arguments on both sides were discussed for several days; and at length we agreed, without a dissenting voice, "It is by no means expedient that the Methodists should

¹ *C. Wesley's Journal*.² *Ibid.*³ *Ibid.*⁴ *Ibid.*⁵ *Ibid.*⁶ J. S. Simon, *John Wesley the Master Builder*, p. 12.

leave the Church of England". John Wesley never wavered in his attachment to the Church, but he found it increasingly difficult to hold his followers to the same attachment. So in 1758 he published his *Twelve Reasons for not Separating from the Church*. They can be summarized as follow: '1. It is by no means expedient . . . 2. It would be a contradiction to the solemn and repeated declarations which we have made in all manner of ways . . . 3. It would exceedingly prejudice against us many who fear . . . who love God, and thereby hinder their receiving as much benefit from our preaching . . . 4. It would hinder multitudes . . . who neither love nor fear God from hearing us at all . . . 5. It would occasion many hundreds, if not some thousands . . . who are now united with us, to separate from us . . . 6. It would be throwing balls of wild-fire among them that are now quiet in the land'—that is, the Methodists. '7. It would create disturbance', and therefore cause their leader (Wesley himself) to be engaged 'in a thousand controversies, both in public and private . . . 8. To form the plan of a new Church would require infinite time and care . . . with much more wisdom and greater depth and extensiveness of thought than any of us are masters of . . . 9. Evil fruits have already followed' from those who had slight thoughts of it, 'such as prejudice against the Clergy in general . . . 10. The experiment has been so frequently tried already, and the success never answered the expectation . . . 11. Melancholy instances of this' are 'even now before our eyes . . . 12. We should act in direct contradiction to that very end for which we believe God hath raised us up.' Our first message is 'to the lost sheep of the Church of England'.¹

Recommending his preachers to attend the Church regularly, he concluded by saying: 'It would be well for every Methodist Preacher, who has no scruple concerning it, to attend the Service of the Church as often as conveniently he can. And the more we attend it, the more we love it.'² His brother Charles hastened to add his approval to the persuasions which John published: 'I think myself bound in duty to add my testimony to my brother's. His twelve reasons against our ever separating from the Church of England are mine also. I subscribe to them with all my heart. Only with regard to the first, I am quite clear that it is neither expedient nor lawful for me to separate; and I never had the least inclination or temptation so to do.'

¹ *Works*, vol. 13, pp. 193-5.

² *Ibid.*, p. 199.

My affection for the Church is as strong as ever; and I clearly see my calling; which is, to live and die in her communion. This, therefore, I am determined to do, the Lord being my helper.¹

Writing to the *London Chronicle* on December 26, 1760, John Wesley gave the reason for the rise of the separatist movement. The floodgates of persecution, he avowed, had been opened against the Methodists mainly by the members and clergy of the Established Church. Some of his followers 'were startled at this, and proposed a question when they were together at Leeds "whether they ought not to separate from the Church?" But after it had been fairly and largely considered they were, one and all satisfied, that they ought not.' For permitting laymen to take part in the important debate, Wesley apparently had been severely criticized. He justified his action by saying that he wanted 'to confirm their adherence to it'—that is, the Church; 'And they were so confirmed that only two, out of the whole number, have since separated from it.' When his critics desired to know what would have happened had the majority decided to vote for separation, Wesley retorted that the sky was just as likely to fall.²

As Methodists increased in numbers, the restrictions and inhibitions became more onerous; concessions had to be made. On July 24, 1781, five of the loyal Methodists at Baildon in Yorkshire wanted to know how to behave when their parish minister expounded Calvinistic doctrines. Alive to the dangers of the situation, Wesley left the matter to the decision of their individual consciences. When the Conference met a few days later, he asked the advice of its members. After due consideration, they agreed 'that it was highly expedient that all the Methodists . . . who had been bred therein, should attend the service of the Church, as often as possible; but that if the minister began either to preach the absolute decrees or to rail at and ridicule Christian perfection, they should quietly and silently go out of the Church; yet attend it again the next opportunity'.³ Further concessions were made at the Bristol Conference in 1786. Services hitherto forbidden during Church hours were now to be permitted: '1. When the Minister is a notoriously wicked man; 2. When he preaches Arian or any other equally pernicious doctrine; 3. When there are not churches in the town sufficient to contain half the people; and

¹ *Works*, vol. 13, p. 199.

² *London Chronicle*, December 27, 1760.

³ *Works*, vol. 13, p. 213.

4. When there is no church at all within two or three miles.'¹

Wesley had some difficulty over the problem at Epworth during the year 1788. 'I fain would prevent the members here from leaving the Church,' he wrote on July 6, 'but I cannot do it; as Mr. G—— is not a pious man, but rather an enemy to piety, who frequently preached against the truth and those who hold it and love it; I cannot with all my influence persuade them either to hear him, or to attend the sacrament administered by him.'² At Nottingham a week later he claimed that the Methodists presented 'a new phenomenon. . . . All these were when they first set out, members of the Established Church; and a great majority of them, probably nine in ten, continue such at this day.' Often tempted to leave the Church, 'they will not separate . . . they will not be a distinct body'.³

The question of separation was considered again at the Conference in 1788. Referring to the discussion, Wesley remarked that 'one of the most important points considered . . . was, That of leaving the Church. The sum of a long conversation was, that in the course of fifty years, we had neither premeditatively nor willingly varied from it in one article, either of doctrine or discipline. 2. That we were not yet conscious of varying from it in any point of doctrine. 3. That we have, in the course of years, out of necessity, not choice, slowly and warily varied in points of discipline, by preaching in the fields, by extemporary prayer, by employing lay Preachers, by forming and regulating Societies and by holding Yearly Conferences: but we did none of these things till we were convinced we could no longer omit them but at the peril of our souls.'⁴

About this time Wesley explained more fully his idea of separation. 'The question', he claimed, 'properly refers to a total and immediate separation . . . to go to Church no more, and have no more connexion with the Church of England than with the Church of Rome.'⁵ Such a separation he had always opposed, though admitting that a certain 'kind of separation' had already taken place, and would eventually spread because of the behaviour of those clergy who neither lived nor preached the gospel.

The last scenes of his life were marked by a final effort to prevent the inevitable and protest against the actual. 'I do not separate from the Church, nor have any intention so to do', he

¹ *Works*, vol. 13, p. 224.

² *Journal*.

³ *Works*, vol. 13, pp. 232-3.

⁴ *Journal*, August 4, 1788.

⁵ *Works*, vol. 13, p. 230.

wrote to certain persons in Dublin. 'Neither do they that meet on Sunday-noon separate from the Church, any more than they did before. Nay, less; for they attend the Church and sacrament oftener now than they did two years ago.' Advising his correspondents not to worry over this matter, he concluded, 'There can be no such separation while I live'.¹ In his *Farther Thoughts on Separation from the Church*, written on December 11, 1789, he treats of his early attachment to the Church and recounts some details in his fight against separation: 'I never had any design of separating from the Church. I have no such design now. I do not believe the Methodists in general design it, when I am no more seen. I do, and will do, all that is in my power to prevent such an event.'²

The test of John Wesley's desire and declaration came immediately after his death. Disputes broke out in many places concerning Methodist services in church hours, and the administration of the Sacrament by Methodist preachers. After a serious debate, Conference in 1791 decided to continue the old plan, but before many weeks had passed the wisdom of this decision was discussed in many Districts.³ At a united meeting of the Leeds, Wakefield, Sheffield, Birstal, Dewsbury, Bradford, and Otley Circuits, it was unanimously agreed early in May 'not to separate from the Church'.⁴ About a month later the preachers belonging to the Leicester, Northampton, Nottingham and Derby District came to a similar conclusion, resolving 'to remain in their present situation with regard to the Established Church'.⁵ The preachers of the Stockton District also 'determined to abide by their original plan, and not to separate from the Church'.⁶ The Newcastle preachers came to a different conclusion. They 'were unanimously of opinion, that the members of their Societies ought to have full liberty to receive the Sacrament among themselves, or at Church, or wherever they can most to their own satisfaction. They also resolved to administer the ordinance to such of their community as shall desire.'⁷

A very unusual course was taken at the Conference in 1793. An address from the Conference was sent to all the Societies of the Connexion. It begins by saying that 'Our venerable Father . . . lived and died a member of the Church of England.

¹ *Works*, vol. 13, p. 234.

² *Ibid*, pp. 240-1.

³ A Methodist term for an organized area.

⁴ *Leeds Intelligencer*, May 7, 1792.

⁵ *Ibid.*, June 4, 1792.

⁶ *Ibid.*, June 18, 1792.

⁷ *Ibid*, June 11, 1792.

His attachment to it was so strong, and so unshaken, that nothing but irresistible necessity induced him to deviate from it in any degree.' It was but natural that many of the Societies should desire to follow in his steps; but others desired to partake of the Sacrament in their own chapels and have services suitable to themselves. The Conference, however, wished all of them 'to continue, as usual, in connection with the Church of England'. Finally, it was ordained 'That the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper shall not be administered by the preachers in any part . . . except where the whole society is unanimous for it, and will not be content without it'.¹

But the wind on the heath was not stilled; in spite of official entreaty, the unrest and agitation began to spread throughout the Connexion. John Pawson afterwards confessed that at the Conference in 1794 'our disputes were very high respecting the sacrament, the trustees of several chapels being much dissatisfied, so that an unhappy division took place in the Society at Bristol'.² Referring to this dispute concerning 'the separation from the Church', the *Leeds Intelligencer* of October 13, 1794, quotes the last declaration of Wesley, when he said, 'I never had any design of separating from the Church . . . I live and die a member of the Church of England'. So serious became the clash of minds and hearts and the division of loyalties that the Conference in 1795 was compelled to consider proposals to end disputes. It was decided to appoint a number of responsible preachers to prepare a scheme of pacification. In due time a plan was presented to the Conference and endorsed; it was agreed that in those places where the Sacrament had been administered it should be permissible to continue the practice; in other places it could not be granted unless a majority of trustees, leaders, and stewards desired it.³

Accepted by most of the preachers the Plan of Pacification did not prevent a conflagration in 1797. Dissatisfaction in many quarters was revealed, largely because of the restrictions imposed upon the Methodist people out of regard and respect for the Established Church. Apparently some of the preachers were too fierce and forthright in denunciation of the old plan: they were expelled from the Connexion; a number of laymen sympathizing with them voluntarily left the original body. In all about 7,000 members forsook the Connexion, forming

¹ *Arminian Magazine*, 1793, p. 495. *Leeds Intelligencer*, August 12, 1793.

² *Early Methodist Preachers*, vol. 1, p. 362.

³ *Arminian Magazine*, 1795, p. 469.

themselves into a new denomination, to be called the 'New Connexion'. Most of the seceders belonged to the North of England and the Midlands. They claimed the right to fix the hours of worship at the time most convenient to themselves, and to receive the Sacrament in their own chapels at the hands of their own preachers. Considering the strength of the agitation, and the period of years in which it continued to grow, the number leaving the old Connexion was exceedingly small, and the gap left in membership was restored before many Conferences had gone.

Relations between the Methodists and the Establishment remained confused and uncertain, but towards the end of the century they took shape and form in a way the Methodists did not expect. Dr. Coke, at one time mentioned as a possible successor to John Wesley, had advocated in 1786 a separation from the Church of England; he now sought a definite and formal union with the same. In 1799 he had conversations with the Bishop of London about the prospects of such union, but his lordship turned down all the suggestions and proposals. From that hour the Methodism of John Wesley moved away from the Church and came more into line with the Three denominations (Baptist, Congregational and Presbyterian). In 1818 Methodist preachers were allowed for the first-time to be called ministers; with the advent of the Tractarian Movement inside the Anglican Church, the separation deprecated by John and Charles Wesley became the accepted fact.

The Methodists, as part of their mission and purpose, had in mind the reform of the nation, and who can condemn them? Drastic rehabilitation in the realm of State and Society was certainly and urgently needed. The entire government of the country was in the hands of rich, influential aristocrats. They made the laws; they administered them. Government, both local and central, was essentially a monopoly of the nobly born and the well-to-do. Nobody could become a Member of Parliament without plenty of money to start with; to get into the House was a costly affair. Usually the possession of property gave the right to vote in the so-called Parliamentary elections; these elections, if regularly held, were in the main either a farce or a matter of form. In numerous instances a seat in the House of Commons was the gift of but a few burgesses. Bribery and corruption flourished like poison flowers in the constituencies. Huge sums of money were expended in treating voters and

securing their franchises. Seats in the House were the result of monetary transactions in many cases; they were bought and sold. So did it come to pass that the Duke of Newcastle could control a large number of places and affect Government policy thereby. Part of the cost of getting into the House might come back to the fortunate ones in the form of sinecures, of which rich and refreshing fruit there was no real scarcity. The Convention with Spain was signed in 1739; among those who voted for it, seventy-three were each in receipt of £1,000 a year or more from the State, forty-seven of sums between £500 and £1,000 a year, twelve of under £500 a year, and no less than seventy had relatives in lucrative positions. Of those who voted against the Convention ten were in receipt of an annual sum of £1,000 or more each, ten drew between £500 and £1,000 a year each, and eleven less than £500 a year each. Altogether two hundred and thirty-three Members of Parliament drew annually from the golden reservoir a stream estimated at £212,956 13s. 4d.¹ Agitation in favour of Parliamentary reform had been rising in the country; beginning in Yorkshire about 1780, it spread to other areas. County meetings to further reform were held in different centres and political associations came into being. William Pitt declared himself in favour of changes in the electoral system, but the outbreak of the French Revolution took the momentum from the movement. •

A reform in the social life of the nation was equally necessary. 'All work and no play' was the maxim imposed upon the lower and labouring classes by the rulers in eighteenth-century England. To be idle meant to be wicked, Satan finding mischief for such to do, appeared to be the industrial philosophy and practice. Most of the poor had no time for any social enjoyment. No parks, no open spaces, were provided for them, of course. The civic amenities characterizing the beginning of the twentieth century were absent. Sports and games were vulgar and degrading for the most part. Rough football in the streets, visits to local fairs or wakes, watching fisticuffs or cock-fights provided pastimes. But the rich in the land had plenty of time, opportunity, and space in which to engage in social enjoyment; he could ride and hunt, he could fish, he could shoot game in season. At home he could live and entertain lavishly, or be entertained sumptuously.

Reform in the economic life of the people was likewise urgent. •

¹ S.P., 36, 49.

The chronicles of distress and suffering forming an earlier chapter in this book disclose that much was sadly wrong. The sharp antithesis between sordid squalor and starvation on the one hand and plenty and abundance did not seem unduly to disturb the minds of these in political and industrial power. Little children could be sold into employment which was more than drudgery; it was slavery; small boys could be forced to squeeze themselves through the hot and sooty and suffocating flues of chimneys; innocent lives were bruised and ruined by the insensitive wheels of industry; misery was everywhere; pestilence and penury walked by night and noon and a deep darkness covered the people.

Imperative the need of reforms in the political, the social, and the economic ramifications of the State; even more imperative was the need for change in the judiciary. A frequent visitor to this land in the eighteenth century bluntly asserted that England was the only country in Europe where people were murdered by law. How near the truth that statement is revealed in the following facts. At one Old Bailey Sessions twenty-four unfortunates were sentenced to death, mostly for theft and robbery; at two Sessions sixty-five; at seven Sessions one hundred and fifty; in one year for England alone nearly five hundred. The crimes for which most of these sentences were inflicted would be regarded in our day as petty offences: for example, five condemned for robbery to the value of 2s., three glass drops, a knife and a rule; two women for 3s. 2d.; two for 2s.; two for 1s. 10½d.; two for a watch and 1s.; two for three silver spoons; two for 4d., a handkerchief and a knife; two for 2½d.; one for 1s.; one for 10½d.; one for 8¼d.; and one for 6d. Many of those ordered to make a rendezvous with death were very young; one a girl of nineteen, tried and sentenced three days after giving birth to a child in Newgate; another a girl of eighteen and an orphan; a boy of sixteen for a silver spoon; a boy of fourteen for a brass window screw; a boy of eleven; a boy and girl of fourteen and eleven for a frock, a tippet, and a cap; two boys of fourteen and twelve for a piece of silk handkerchief; three boys under fourteen; eight boys and seven women fill the court with lamentations and cries for mercy, but told by the Recorder 'not to indulge any hope of mercy'. Human life was counted very cheap. Among those actually executed were three for 3s. 6d. and a pen-knife, one of them only sixteen; three for a silver watch; two for a pair

of silver buckles; two for 2s. and a key; one for 1s. 9d.; one for 1s.; one for a cotton gown; one for 6d.; one for 2d.; a girl of nineteen burnt to death. Yet a correspondent to a London newspaper thought it was too merciful to let them 'glide so gently out of the world'. He preferred castration and slow torture to death. The system of transportation came very near to his ideal method of torture. Prior to 1763, fifteen to twenty thousand convicts were sent to Maryland, most of them to be sold as white slaves. One contractor sold 3,311 in seven years from £8 to £25 each. At one period fifteen hundred were being banished annually from their native land, many of them never to return; at another eighteen hundred were being transported, one-third of them under twenty-one. One batch of ninety-six women had committed offences which averaged at 5s. a person.

And in the gaols at home brutalities were normal and usual. 'Thus at Newgate all felons were ironed; it was the same at Chelmsford.'¹ 'Of all the seats of woe', wrote John Wesley on January 2, 1761, 'on this side of hell, few, I suppose, exceed or even equal Newgate. If any region of horror could exceed it a few years ago, Newgate in Bristol did; so great was the filth, the stench, the misery, and wickedness, which shocked all that had a spark of humanity left.'² One hundred and thirty-two offenders died in Newgate Gaol in London from 1755 to 1765.³ In some of the private gaols the sufferings of the prisoners were almost indescribable. At Ely, for example, in a gaol owned by the local bishop, the prisoners were sometimes 'chained down upon their backs upon a floor, across which were several iron bars, with an iron collar with spikes about their necks, and a heavy iron bar over their legs. . . . Loading prisoners with irons was very generally practised.'⁴ In other ways, if not on a cross, citizens were crucified; they were tortured to the very gates of death, and death itself must have seemed to be a benison.

Not only were cruelties exercised within the prison walls, but dread humiliations were imposed immediately before, and sometimes after, the executions. Till towards the end of the century hangings were in public; a sickening procession was the prologue to what was like a fair. Immense crowds gathered for these death-dances; sometimes as many as thirty to fifty

¹ A. Griffiths, *The Chronicles of Newgate*, vol. 1, p. 431.

² *Journal. London Chronicle*, January 6-8, 1761.

³ A. Griffiths, *Chronicles of Newgate*, vol. 1, p. 443.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 431.

thousand people were spectators. Often the onlookers were in hilarious mood; sometimes they were swayed by mass emotions, moaning, weeping, praying. The grim scene took on intenser tragedy when unfortunate women were put to death for coining or for poisoning husbands. In most cases the women were strangled, then their bodies were burnt in the public sight; some women were even burnt alive. Catherine Hayes in 1726 suffered such a death.¹ Ann Williams was burnt at the stake in Gloucester on April 13, 1753.² Another woman suffered in the same way a few months later in Somerset.³ The savage extremes to which judicial brutality could go is shown by the report of a Methodist preacher, Thomas Taylor by name. Having attended a malefactor in prison, he accompanied him to the place of execution. Before the final scene was enacted, 'they chopped off his right hand, with a great axe, just as a butcher would chop off a piece of beef with a cleaver'.⁴

On Friday, March 5, 1756, 'two chief takers', Berry and Macdaniel, were exposed to brutal punishment. Ordered to the pillory near Hatton Gardens, Holborn, 'the mob continued pelting the Fellows, till it was supposed they were both dead'. They were taken down dumb in their agonies and carried back to Newgate. 'Berry was weak when he was put in', and it was thought he would 'scarce live to stand a Second Time'. (They had been sentenced to a second turn at the pillory.) Macdaniel had received a wound 'in his forehead with a Stone', and it was thought he would not recover.⁵ Two others were sentenced to the same ordeal and ordered to go through it twice over.⁶ In March, 1762, John Berry is reported to have died in Newgate. How he survived the terrible and scandalous ordeal of March 5, 1756, it is hard to understand. His six years at Newgate must have been purgatory. Others charged with the same crime and sentenced to the same punishment were not able to linger long. James Egan 'was killed in the pillory by pelting'. James Salmon, cruelly treated at the same time, died in prison. Only Steven Macdaniel was alive at the end of March, 1762.⁷

Laws supposed to apply to the whole nation fell with fearful

¹ A. W. Twyford and Major A. Griffiths, *Records of York Castle*, p. 99.

² *Newgate Calendars*, vol. 2, p. 178. Also *Gent's. Mag.*, 1753, p. 198.

³ *Norwich Mercury*, September 1, 1753.

⁴ *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, vol. 2, p. 355.

⁵ *Public Advertiser*, March 6, 1756.

⁶ *Gent's. Mag.*, 1756, pp. 90, 146.

⁷ *London Chronicle*, March 20-3, 1762.

weight on the suffering poor. John Wesley knew and observed that real justice was hard to come by in the law courts in those times. 'Suppose a great man . . . oppress the needy; suppose the rich grind the face of the poor; what remedy', he asks, 'against such oppression can he find in the Christian country? If the one is rich and the other poor, doth not justice stand afar off? And is not the poor under the almost improbability (if not impossibility) of obtaining it? Perhaps the hazard is greater among us, than either among Jews, Turks, or Heathens.'¹ Citing the case of a poor man who had suffered wrong at the hands of a rich one, can the former, he asks, find 'twelve good men and true' that will do him justice? 'But where will you find them—men unbiassed, incapable of corruption, superior both to fear and favour, to every view, whether of gain or loss?' And Wesley lamented that a poor man might be at his wits end to find an honest attorney and in vain might poverty appeal to the Lord Chancellor.² The doors were shut against way-faring men.

Reform in the moral and religious life of the nation was urgently needed. What John Wesley thought about the moral condition of the people is in his *Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, published in 1746. With unflinching frankness, as in St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, he depicts the wickedness of the nation. 'Forgetfulness of God and neglect of His holy ordinances, swearing, perjury, sabbath breaking, drunkenness, lasciviousness, speaking evil of dignitaries and robbery' are among the chief sins of the time. 'Attorneys are lashed as being in some instances less honest than pickpockets. . . . The guardians of public charities are charged with sacrilege. Lying was one of the fashions of the day. . . . Pride was rampant; and even cobblers in London thought themselves wiser than secretaries of state, and coffee house disputers abler divines than Archbishops. Prisons were schools of vice, out of which prisoners emerged fitted for any kind or degree of villainy, perfectly brutal and devilish. In the army, profanity was fearful. In the navy almost every man-of-war was a floating hell. The clergy were not free from the taint of lewdness and drunkenness, from covetousness and idleness, from neglecting the poor and flattering the rich.'³ Speaking of those living near the coast, Wesley contends that they 'trample on all laws by a course of

¹ *Works*, vol. 8, p. 165.

² *Ibid.*, p. 166.

³ Tyerman, *Life of Wesley*, vol. 1, pp. 532-3.

thieving, or receiving stolen goods'.¹ 'The generality of peasants', he adds, 'are not only grossly, stupidly, I had almost said, brutishly ignorant, as to all the arts of life, but eminently so with regard to religion and the life to come.'² In his pamphlet, *A Word in Season, Advice to an Englishman*, he throws out the challenge: 'What Wickedness is there under heaven which is not found among us this day? . . . The thefts, cheating, fraud, extortion, the injustice, violence, oppression; the lying and dissimulating, the robberies, sodomies and murders; with a thousand unnamed villainies, are common to us.'³

Whether John Wesley desired to rectify the evils in the political, social, economic, and judicial regions of the State, he does not tell us. Perhaps he was too much of a High Churchman to meddle with these things. But certainly he condemned the corruption connected with the administration of national affairs. The reform he most earnestly sought after was a moral and religious one. He desired a real revival of religion in the land; he prayed and pleaded to see the New Testament Christianity in action in the country and in the times in which he lived. Seeking the salvation of the individual soul, most precious in the sight of God, was the first thing among the Methodists after each member had himself been saved. Explaining the commission entrusted to the Methodist preachers, John Wesley said to them one day: 'You have nothing to do but to save souls.' That was primary and paramount. In that high and impassioned mission they did much to reform and exalt the nation.

The Methodists had in mind the reform of the Established Church. As one ordained, John Wesley knew something of the sins of omission and commission on the part of the clergy. In a letter to the Church at Herrnhut in Germany, written on October 14, 1738, he disclosed that he knew of 'Ten Ministers' only 'who lay the right foundation'.⁴ While George White was Incumbent of Colne between 1741 and 1751 he 'drank himself first into jail, and then into his grave'.⁵ Writing to John Smith on July 10, 1747, from St. Ives, Wesley stated that 'the two clergymen' there 'on a late public occasion, were led home at one or two in the morning in such a condition as I care not to describe. One of them is rector of Lelant . . . at Zennor he keeps another assistant, and one is just as sober as himself and

¹ *Works*, vol. 9, p. 225.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 183.

⁴ *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 261.

⁵ *Wesley Historical Society Proceedings*, vol. 3, p. 53.

near as zealous.¹ Added to the sin of drunkenness were the evils of pluralism, absenteeism, preferment, and nepotism. Intrigue and influence, not merit and integrity, were wont to serve best in climbing the winding stairway to higher positions in the Church. In too many cases 'the revenues were used as a sort of outdoor relief for the aristocracy'.² With vehement vividness, the Church of the period has been described 'as the biggest den of thieves in the whole world'.³ A degree of credibility is lent to the startling statement by the fact that a close relative of Lord North was said to have taken from ecclesiastical funds at least £1,500,000 and in addition succeeded in getting thirty different livings for his sons and sons-in-law; one of them had eight at one and the same time and drained from the Church upwards of £300,000. Lord Hugh Percy, Bishop of Carlisle, got more than £250,000, and on his Lordship's son and sons-in-law fell copious and fruitful showers of canonries, prebendary stalls, and rectories. As to Beresford's family, 'one got £350,000, another received just under £300,000, and a third a quarter of a million, and the fourth, who had only four livings at one and the same time, got £58,000'.⁴

To John Wesley reforming the Church did not mean changing the constitution, the hierarchy, the doctrines, the liturgy; with these he was perfectly satisfied; he wanted purer personnel and a health and wholesomeness in the private and public conduct and conversation of individual members. In harmony with that purpose, he made an agreement in February, 1738, with Messrs. Ingham, Stonehouse, Hall, Hutchings, Kinchin, all of them clergymen, 'to be Bible Christians at all events; and, wherever they were, to preach with all their might, plain, old Bible Christianity'.⁵ In that spirit he called to his assistance a number of clergymen who would travel with him on occasions and help him in the annual Conferences. In the middle years of his ministry, clergymen like Grimshaw of Haworth, the Perronets of Shoreham, Fletcher of Madeley, Adams of Wintringham, Venn of Huddersfield, Knight of Halifax, Cross of Bradford, Henry Crooke of Hunslet, and Walker of Truro gave valuable aid.⁶ In a strong endeavour to form a band and company and fellowship of evangelical clergymen, united in zeal and determination to reform the Church, he issued a circular

¹ *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 99.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 340.

⁵ *Works*, vol. 8, p. 349.

² Whiteley, *John Wesley*, p. 336.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 337.

⁶ *Wesley Historical Society Proceedings*, vol. 2, p. 115.

letter of appeal on April 19, 1764. The response was poor and unpromising, and never again did he attempt such a union. He did continue to maintain his friendly contacts with a number of clergy, occasionally preaching in their churches, sometimes assisting in the administration of the Holy Sacrament, often accepting their personal hospitalities and courtesies when in their neighbourhoods. Most persevering in persuasions and efforts to reform and rejuvenate the Church, he advised his followers to go regularly to the services and partake of the Lord's Supper at every opportunity. After the death of John Wesley, some of the Methodist preachers still clung to the belief that they were 'messengers sent by the Lord . . . to provoke the regular Clergy to jealousy, and to supply their lack of service towards those who are perishing for want of knowledge'.¹

Last but not least among the objects of the early Methodists was the spread of Scriptural holiness in the land. In that fine and most worthy respect they were following the example of the religious societies existing before Wesley's time—namely, 'to promote real holiness of heart and life'.² 'There is no doubt that John Wesley intended his Societies to be an exact repetition of what was done by Beveridge, Horneck and Smythies sixty-two years before.'³ At the services held by his mother at Epworth in the January of 1711, those who came agreed to banish 'all temporal concerns from our Society'.⁴ The nucleus of the Society formed at the Foundery towards the end of 1739 consisted of those desiring Wesley's assistance in the search for a more deeply religious life in the personal sense and experience. In all Societies formed afterwards, the same emphasis is found or implied. In the weekly meetings the Scriptures were accepted as the rule and measure of faith and practice. As the Movement developed and Methodist preaching places were appointed, the religion of the New Testament was regularly expounded and enforced. The hymns fervently sung and the sermons spoken with sacred ardour revolved round the great Scriptural themes and affirmations and in particular and in inescapable prominence the annunciations of the Evangel; the gospel was taken to the minds and hearts of the multitudes and the *Logos* entered in at lowly doors. The diapason of God's love in Christ Jesus, His gift to the world for man's salvation, was sounded. The New Testament became alive and living in England.

¹ *Minutes* for 1797.

² J. S. Simon, *The Religious Societies*, p. 15.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

CHAPTER II

THE PERSECUTION OF THE METHODISTS

MOST observers of English social life in the eighteenth century might reasonably have come to the conclusion that these Methodist pioneers with their programme of religious and social reform could not possibly do any harm to any section of the nation and ought therefore to be treated with toleration, perhaps even with indulgence—in any event with indifference. Others might have inferred that as the repeated official attempts to suppress crime and disorder apparently had failed, then here was an opportunity of trying some new method. Why not have given to these self-appointed reformers all the support that was possible, even to the extent of a financial subsidy if need be? Such a course was never followed, never discussed, never thought of; just the very opposite. Instead of being encouraged, supported, financed, the Methodists for many years and in many places were hampered, criticized, misrepresented, mocked at, persecuted. With very few exceptions, the whole of the clergy worked against them; in many instances they incited the mobs to violent opposition.

As in Jerusalem, it was the hierarchy that prompted, for in part archbishops and bishops were responsible. The Archbishop of York showed his dislike by advising his clergy to be always on guard against their deadly contagion.¹ Their sincerity in the work of religious reform was described by the Bishop of Lichfield as 'melancholy enthusiasm', and liable 'to create infidels'.² Dr. Lavington, Bishop of Exeter, was extremely severe in his denunciation, and the Bishop of London and the Bishop of Oxford publicly joined in the fierce chorus.

With these examples of episcopal hostility to encourage them, some leading divines hastily joined in the campaign of unbridled obloquy. Dr. Trapp not only preached in opposition to the Methodists in a series of four sermons on 'the Nature, Folly, Sin and Danger of being Righteous Overmuch', but also caused these discourses to be published in a cheap edition and widely circulated.³ Charging John Wesley with 'inconsistencies', Dr. Tucker finally dubbed him a disguised 'Dominican'.⁴ The

¹ *Works*, vol. 8, p. 59.

² *Gent's Mag.*, 1739, p. 271.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁴ *Works*, vol. 8, p. 365.

Rev. Thomas Church, Vicar of Battersea and Prebendary of St. Paul's, ascribed to him 'false notions of the Church', contending that he was 'breaking its rules and disobeying its governors'.¹ A voice from Ireland asserted that Wesley had procured for himself a huge income of £886,000 a year by robbing the poor, thus leaving them with 'neither bread to eat, nor raiment to wear'.² Dr. Free believed that the Methodist people, by propagating 'downright Atheism', not only undermined 'the legal establishment of the Church', but also destroyed the very 'foundation of all religion'.³ He piled insult on insult; all of them were 'pickpockets, rebels, blasphemers, Atheists'.⁴ The Rector of St. Michael's, Wood Street, London, contributed further epithets of humiliation: they were 'filthy dreamers', 'grievous wolves', and therefore 'enemies not only to Christianity, but to every religion'. By 'adding blasphemy to enthusiasm', they have become 'close friends of the Church of Rome', and in consequence 'must be enemies of society'.⁵

Contemporary publications took up the note of harsh disparagement. From 1737 to 1742 the *Weekly Miscellany* contained bitter attacks on Methodist preachers. On Saturday, June 28, 1740, a pamphlet entitled *The True Spirit of the Methodists and Their Allies* was commended; from a reading of the same, the Editor argued that his readers would obtain 'a right notion and just Abhorrence of Methodism', making them 'active in their Endeavour to suppress so pernicious a Sect, set on Foot . . . by Jesuits, and encouraged by Deists, and all the Enemies of the Church of England'. When John Wesley tried to provide work for some of the unemployed poor in London by setting up a spinning wheel at the Foundery, the Editor remarked that he was doing it only for selfish gain: 'By his Preaching, Bookselling, Work-house and Spinning, he gets 700£', and possibly 'about 1000£' a year.⁶

The *Gentleman's Magazine* was no less severe. On occasions scurrilous articles about Methodists were copied verbatim from the *Weekly Miscellany*. On April 19, 1739, 'the pernicious Nature and Tendencies of Methodism' were discussed in an article bearing the signature, 'Common Sense'. Charging Methodists with detaining 'the Vulgar from their daily labour', the writer anticipated as a consequence 'a prodigious Rise in the Price of Coals, about the City of Bristol'.⁷ Stoking up its wrathful fires,

¹ *Works*, vol. 8, p. 438. ² *Ibid.*, vol. 9, p. 82. ³ *Ibid.*, vol. 8, p. 502. ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 504.

⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 9, pp. 100, 107. ⁶ April 25, 1741. ⁷ *Gent's Mag.*, 1739, p. 255.

the *Magazine* declared that 'they send People to Bedlam, there to repent, when they have lost their senses'.¹ Later the Methodists were said to 'have this Fatal Tendency, to make their hearers distracted. . . . There have been above *thirty* of them, from Time to Time in *Bedlam*; and there are *six* of them there at present.'² Eighteenth-century journalism descends to the depths of infamy by alleging that the Methodist preacher at Salisbury 'was suspected of being in the interest of our enemies'; there were the fears of 'many sober and judicious persons . . . that the nocturnal meetings held at his house were scenes of debauchery and impurity; for now and then 'a bastard child was bro't into the world by some of his female devotees'.³ The *Magazine* burns like a furnace through most of the century; in 1792 the Methodists tend 'to overthrow Church and State'.⁴ A few years later they are 'traitors', under the influence of 'the Jacobins' of the country.⁵

Among the provincial newspapers, the *Norwich Mercury* in 1751 and 1752 was conspicuous in hostility. The teaching and practice of Methodists were detrimental to the trade, business, and manufactures of the city: 'Great Mischiefs have already happened . . . in frequently taking away ignorant People from their Employments.'⁶ The Editor published a special pamphlet 'Addressed to the Inhabitants of Norwich' and entitled *A Serious Caution against Enthusiasm and Religious Delusion. . . . On Occasion of the Particular Delusion of Methodists now growing up among Them*. With bitter and burning words, he brands the activities of local Methodists. Citing a letter from the *London Evening Post* of December 29, 1751, he agreed that 'the Methodistical Preaching . . . makes terrible Havock' by opening 'a door to all Manner of Sloth and Idleness', which 'is proved to be the bane of Industry'; through 'a mistaken notion of working great Reformation in Men's Lives and Manners, it renders them either in a despairing State', or makes them 'wild and frantick', and 'altogether useless members of the Commonwealth'. 'Some honest, sober thinking Inhabitants', for the sake of 'Peace and Welfare', thundered the Editor, 'came to a Resolution to enforce the Laws against these Pretenders to Inspiration'; in this task, self-imposed, they were assisted by the rabble of the city, a fierce attack being launched against the innocent and defenceless

¹ *Gent's Mag.*, 1739, p. 128.

² *Ibid.*, 1741, p. 320.

³ *Ibid.*, 1747, p. 531.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1792, vol. 2, pp. 852-3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1800, vol. 2, p. 1077.

⁶ *Norwich Mercury*, December 7, 14, 1751.

Methodists. Because of this violent onslaught, the Methodist preacher left the city, but was succeeded by another, whom the *Mercury* called a 'meer Vagrant', 'without shoes to his Feet or Money in his Pocket, not so much as Two-pence to pay for a lodging'.¹

While insults flew like poisoned arrows from pulpit and Press against Methodists (Richard Green, in his *Anti-Methodist Publications*, gives a list of over six hundred as appearing from 1738 to 1809) the ignorant rabble as in Norwich was incited to acts of physical violence. For more than twenty-five years John Wesley had to suffer and endure vile treatment from rude mobs; often, to their shame, local clergymen were the instigators. Wesley's *Journals* are full of information concerning these insults, though he strives to make light of them. On Monday, June 4, 1739, he records the fact that at Bristol many friends advised him 'not to preach abroad in the afternoon, because there was a combination of several persons, who threatened terrible things'. In the face and teeth of such warnings, he preached from the text, 'Fear thou not, for I am with thee'. Again the next day at Bath he was anxiously forewarned 'because no one knew what might happen'. He preached in the open air; Beau Nash, social king of Bath, interrupted Wesley in the course of the service, told him he was acting 'contrary to Act of Parliament' and frightening people 'out of their wits'. A woman of the audience reminded Nash that they had come together 'for the good of their souls'.²

A few months later the crowds in Bristol became more menacing. On the first Tuesday night in April, 1740, while Wesley preached, 'the floods began to lift up their voices'. 'It seemed as if all the host of the aliens were come together with one consent. Not only the court and the alleys, but all the street upwards and downwards, was filled with people shouting, cursing, and swearing, and ready to swallow the ground with fierceness and rage.' Even the Mayor was set at naught and the constables insulted.

Like hostility, vehement and vociferous, was shown by some of the crowds in London. In the evening of September 14, 1740, Wesley, returning to his lodge from a preaching tour, was met at the door by a fierce mob gathered in great numbers. Immediately he began to speak to them of 'righteousness and judgement to come'; as a result, a general quietness came upon

¹ *Norwich Mercury*, January 11, 1752.

² *Journal*.

them and after a time their curses changed to praises. A fortnight later the mob again waited for him at his door; once more those who threatened were stilled by the brave dignity and bearing of the man.

Preaching in the open in London on Sunday, July 12, 1741, a new trick was tried on him. 'Many of the rabble had brought an ox, which they vehemently laboured to drive in among the people.' 'In spite of them all', the beast, said Wesley, 'ran round and round, one way and the other, and at length broke through the midst of them clear away'.¹ At Long Acre a few months later, 'the servants of the devil', as he describes them, 'were above measure enraged; they not only made all possible noise . . . but violently thrust many persons to and fro, struck others, and broke down part of the house'. Not content, they threw large stones 'which . . . together with the tiles' 'fell down . . . among the people, so that they were in danger of their lives'.² Another attempt at driving and enforcing an angry animal into the congregation was made at Pensford, near Bristol, on Friday, March 19, 1742. 'A great company of rabble, hired for that purpose', brought a bull which they tried to drive into the audience. 'But the beast', observes Wesley, 'was wiser than his drivers, and continually ran either on one side . . . or the other.' After becoming 'weak and tired' with 'being so long torn and beaten both by dogs and men', the helpless animal was 'partly dragged and partly thrust . . . in among the people'. Finding the bull unwilling, the crowd tried to upset the preacher and finally 'wreaked their vengeance on the table, which they tore bit to bit'.³ On another occasion near Whitechapel the mob 'endeavoured to drive in a herd of cows among them, but the brutes were wiser than their masters. Then they threw whole showers of stones, one of which', confessed Wesley, 'struck me just between the eyes.' Wiping away the blood, he went on preaching.⁴

Persecution became even more violent in the course of the year 1743. At St. Ives in Cornwall on Friday, September 16, while Wesley was preaching, 'the mob of the town burst into the room, and created much disturbance; roaring, and striking those that stood in the way'. He received a blow on the head, but succeeded in persuading the fierce ringleaders from further violence.⁵

¹ *Journal*.

² *Ibid.*, January 25, 1742.

³ *Journal*.

⁴ *Ibid.*, September 12, 1742.

⁵ *Journal*.

A month later the mobs in Darlaston and Walsall rose furiously in tumult, no doubt encouraged by the notice from the local magistrates, J. Lane and W. Persehouse, 'to all High Constables, Petty Constables and other of His Majesty's Peace Officers' within the county of Staffordshire; 'and particularly to the Constable of Tipton', to the effect 'that several disorderly persons, styling themselves Methodist Preachers, go about raising routs and riots, to the great damage of his Majesty's Liege people and against the peace of His Sovereign Lord the King'. In order to suppress such activities, 'His Majesty's Officers' were requested 'to make diligent search after the said Methodist Preachers, and to bring him or them before some of us his said Majesty's Justices of the Peace, to be examined concerning their unlawful doings'.¹

Probably acting on that instruction, the mob at Wednesbury on October 20 went to the home of Francis Ward, where John Wesley was busy writing after preaching in the streets. Surrounding the house, they cried out again and again: 'Bring out the minister; we will have the minister.' Wesley himself went boldly out to them. Instantly they surged round him, hustled him off to Bentley Hall, the residence of J. Lane, the magistrate, but that Justice of the Peace refused to parley with them; he sent a message that he was in bed. Not to be thwarted, the ruffians with their prey proceeded to Walsall to confront W. Persehouse, who likewise refused to see them. Then a Walsall mob appeared on the scene and broke up the Wednesbury crowd. 'The noise on every side', declares Wesley, 'was like the roaring of the sea; so they dragged me along till we came to the town, where seeing the door of a large house open, I attempted to go in; but a man, catching me by the hair, pulled me back into the middle of the mob.' Carried roughly from one end of the town to the other, he succeeded in finding momentary shelter in a doorway and attempted to speak. 'Many cried out, "No, no! Knock his brains out; down with him; kill him at once."' The whole hubbub began at five in the afternoon and went on until ten o'clock in the evening; the evangelist was at the mercy of hooligans during those dreadful hours. His escape from serious bodily injury was a miracle. He managed to get to Nottingham the next day, where he met his brother Charles, who regarded him as 'delivered out of the mouth of the lion'.² On October 25 some

¹ *Journal*, October 20, 1743.

² *C. Wesley's Journal*, October 21, 1743.

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² *C. Wesley's Journal*, October 21, 1743.

of the Wednesbury Methodists went to see Charles at Nottingham; they described how their leader, John Wesley, 'had been dragged about for three hours by the mobs of three towns'; they avowed that the sole protection he had was from 'three of the brethren, and one of the multitude, who struck at him continually that he might fall. And if he had once been down, he would have been no more. Many blows he escaped through his lowness of stature.' 'Some cried "Drown him! Throw him into a pit." Some "Hang him up upon the next tree." Others, "Away with him, away with him," and some did him the infinite honour to say in express terms, "Crucify him!" One and all said, "Kill him."' 'The Mayor of Walsall refused him protection when entering his house for fear the mob should pull it down.'¹

Civic and ceremonial opposition was tried at Taunton in January, 1744, and an echo of Ephesus sounds. 'The famous Methodist', said a reporter from Hardington, 'dress'd in a Master's Gown and Cassock . . . at the Three Cups Inn . . . began to preach to a very numerous Auditory in the Court; but had scarce named his Text, when the Mayor of the Town came in Formality, and ordered the Proclamation to be read, which immediately silenced the Preacher.' Concluding his narrative, the correspondent adds, 'they have not been troubled with any of these Impertinents since'.²

After an interval of eighteen months, Wesley was back again in Darlaston; on Sunday, May 5, 1745, he preached in the streets. Recording the fact, he says: 'A few at first threw some clods, but they were quickly glad to retreat.' In the evening of the same day at about six o'clock he preached at Goston's Green, Birmingham, when 'it was dangerous for any who stood to hear; for the stones and dirt were flying from every side, almost without intermission, for near an hour'.³

Two months later he had to face the mob at Falmouth. Having gone to see a sick woman, 'the house was beset on all sides by an innumerable multitude of people'. 'The rabble roared . . . "Bring out the Canorum! Where is the Canorum?"' . . . No answer being given, they quickly forced open the outer door, and filled the passage.' After they had broken the inner door, Wesley placed himself in front of them and asked

¹ *C. Wesley's Journal*.

² *Weekly Miscellany*, February 4, 1744. *Gent's Mag.*, January 24, 1744. *Wesley's Historical Society Proceedings*, vol. 4.

³ *Journal*.

what they wanted. As if by magic, the crowd was silenced and very soon dispersed.¹ In the course of the same year, on a visit to the Methodist Society at Leeds, he was pelted 'with dirt and stones, a great part of the way home'. The same brutal rain fell upon him the following night.² But he was back again six months later.³ 'I preached at five', he says. 'As we went home a great mob followed and threw whatsoever came to hand. I was struck several times once or twice in the face—but not hurt at all.'

Visiting Leominster on Thursday, August 14, 1746, he preached on a tombstone close to the south side of the Church. 'The multitude roared on every side; but my voice soon prevailed . . . till they began ringing the bells.' Eventually he withdrew to the market-place to be farther away from the clangour. Entering Devizes on Tuesday, January 13, 1747, he found the town already 'in an uproar'. 'We heard oaths, curses and threatenings. The most active man in stirring up the people . . . was Mr. J. the C.; he had been indefatigable in the work, going all day from house to house. He had been at the pains of setting up an advertisement, in the most public places of the town, 'of an obnubilative . . . entertainment, to be exhibited at Mr. Clark's, where I was to preach.' Returning to the town a fortnight later John Wesley found that 'much pains had been taken again to raise a mob; but was lost labour'.⁴

In the summer of that year, he paid a visit to Plymouth Docks, only to be met by 'thousands of people' saluting him derisively 'with three huzzars'. When he entered the home of Mr. Hide, 'they fought valiantly with the doors and windows'. A Lieutenant 'with his retinue of soldiers and mob' endeavoured to stop him from preaching in the open the following night. When the drums ceased, 'the shouts of the multitude grew fiercer and fiercer'. Quiet was restored when the officer was reminded of duty and dignity.⁵ At Port Isaac a month later 'the mob followed, hallowing and shouting', and Wesley barely escaped physical violence by the intervention of one member of the crowd. Not being able to get a lodging, he went on to Camelford and there, too, a mob growled at him. 'As I walked through the town', he afterwards wrote, 'we had a large train attend us; only one stone struck me on the shoulder', while the Mayor threatened to prosecute if he preached at all.⁶ In

¹ *Journal*, July 4, 1745.

³ *Ibid.*, February 22, 1746.

⁵ *Ibid.*, June 26, 27, 1747.

² *Ibid.*, September 12, 13, 1745.

⁴ *Journal*.

⁶ *Ibid.*, July 25, 1747.

Shepton Mallet on Friday, February 12, 1748, many in the aggressive band of ruffians had been 'hired, prepared and made sufficiently drunk, in order to do all manner of mischief'; on his path from the preaching house to the home of William Stone, the crowd followed 'throwing dirt, stones, and clods in abundance'. Larger stones were thrown after he had entered the house, a shower of them breaking and bursting through the windows; at length the mob surged in like a black tide and the preacher and his companion, Mr. Swindells, were compelled to beat a hasty retreat.¹

A worse reception awaited him at Roughlee on Thursday, August 25, 1748. He was accompanied by Mr. W. Grimshaw, the Rector of Haworth, and on the way was several times most earnestly entreated by friends 'not to go on, for a large mob from Colne was gone before'. When Wesley began to preach, 'a drunken rabble came, with clubs and staves in a tumultuous and riotous manner'; the Deputy Constable requested him to go to the Rev. Mr. White's. 'I had scarcely gone ten yards', said Wesley in a letter to Mr. White, 'when a man . . . struck me with his fist in the face with all his might; quickly after, another threw his stick at my head.' One man, 'cursing and swearing in the most shocking manner, cried out, "Bring him away."' After leaving the house, the mob followed him 'with oaths, curses and stones. . . . One of them beat me to the ground. . . . When I rose again, the whole body came about me like lions and forced me back into the house.' His companion, the Rev. W. Grimshaw, suffered similar treatment, being covered 'with dirt and mire of every kind'. Others in the Wesley party were treated even more harshly; some had to run for their lives, 'amidst showers of dirt and stones, without any regard to age or sex'; others were 'trampled in the mire, and dragged by the hair; . . . Many were beat with clubs without mercy.'² Three days later at the cross in Bolton a wild mob pushed Wesley from the steps several times; repeatedly he returned and finally finished his discourse; but certain of the crowd began to throw stones and two or three in the company were hit.³ John Wesley was back again in the neighbourhood fourteen months later; in Rochdale on Wednesday, October 18, 1749, he found 'the streets lined, on both sides, with multitudes of people shouting, cursing, blaspheming, and gnashing . . . with their teeth'.⁴

¹ *Journal*.

² *Ibid.*, August 25, 1748.

³ *Ibid.*, August 28, 1748.

⁴ *Journal*.

He did not preach in the streets because of the menacing throng and went on to Bolton, but 'the lions at Rochdale were lambs in comparison of those at Bolton. Such rage and bitterness I scarce ever saw before, in any creatures that bore the form of man.' In very few days he was facing the mob at Dudley; on the report that he was preaching there, a 'huge unwieldy noisy multitude' came together. 'Some of Satan's servants pressed in, raging and blaspheming, and throwing whatever came to hand.'¹

After a period of comparative calm, the storm broke again in 1752. In Hull on Friday, April 24, 1752, Mrs. Vazeille with him (they had been married on February 17 the previous year), many of the crowd 'behaved as if possessed by Moloch. . . . Clods and stones flew about on every side'. Pursuing him as he drove back to his place of lodging, they threw 'in at the window . . . whatever came next to hand'; then they attacked the house itself 'with many showers of stones, which they poured in, even into the rooms four stories high'. Dispersing, they rolled back again 'with oaths and curses, and bricks and stones'.² Even in the small township of Barnard Castle a few weeks later 'the mob was so numerous and so loud' that when he attempted to preach in the streets, 'it was not possible for many to hear. . . . Some of the rabble fetched the engine, and threw a good deal of water on the congregation.'³ There was a similar experience at Evesham on Wednesday, March 21, 1753; he was hindered from preaching out of doors. At Buckland, near Frome, 'the Curate', in order to prevent the people hearing, 'had provided a mob with horns, and other things convenient'.⁴ Reaching Popleton in Yorkshire on Thursday, July 14, 1757, he began to preach in the Square; while the service proceeded, 'one egg was thrown, and some bits of dirt'. At Pocklington next morning a large mob had assembled in readiness for him. 'For fear they should not make noise enough, the good Church Warden hired men to ring the bells, but', as Wesley declared, 'it was lost labour.'⁵ He was back again in Cornwall on Wednesday, September 21. As he was at the point of preaching in Gram-pound, he was told bluntly by the constables at the command of the parish minister, who was also Mayor, that he must not hold any service within the borough; not to be thwarted, he went to the outskirts of the town and took his stand just outside the boundary.⁶ On Saturday, August 8, 1761, at Barrow, a mob

¹ *Journal*, October 24, 1749.

² *Journal*.

³ *Ibid.*, May 25, 1752.

⁴ *Ibid.*, September 10, 1753.

⁵ *Journal*.

⁶ *Ibid.*

was waiting for him with the intent of doing great mischief, but, on seeing him, their courage failed; before he left they gave him 'two or three huzzars'.¹ The following August, in Exeter, he took Sacrament with his old protagonist, the Bishop of Exeter, and that same evening went to preach at Southney Green, where he found 'a lewd, profane, drunken vagabond had so stirred up the baser sort, that there was much noise, hurry, and confusion. . . . Several things were thrown, and much pains taken to overthrow the table.' The crowd endeavoured to throw him down, but he walked through the midst and escaped unharmed.² In Derby on Wednesday, March 27, 1764, he attempted to preach in the market-place, but 'the beasts of the people lifted up their voice, hallowing and shouting on every side'; he walked away and left them gaping and astonished. A different kind of opposition was encountered at North Taunton on Wednesday, September 4, 1765. Some local gentry accompanied by a clergyman tried to interfere with the service in the open. When 'the Minister cried out, "That is false doctrine," the roar began. . . . They had brought a huntsman with his hounds; but the dogs were wiser than the men, for they could not bring them to make any noise at all.' Even though in the presence of a clergyman, the language of the gentry 'was as base, foul and porterly as ever was heard at Billingsgate'. The noise was so great and the language so vile that the service had to be abandoned.³ Only slight disturbances were experienced at Feversham on Thursday, December 5, 1765, and at Evesham on Monday, March 17, 1766, and for the rest of his pilgrim-ministry he was treated on the whole with much respect and even reverence.

Charles Wesley, like his brother John, remained an ordained priest in the Church of England, but was an active partner in the establishment of Methodist Societies throughout the land. Naturally, he too had to work in the teeth of opposition. On Saturday, May 21, 1743, he preached on the Town Hall steps of Walsall, when 'the floods lifted up their voice and raged horribly'; they 'roared, and shouted, and threw stones incessantly. Many struck, without hurting me.' Three times he was pushed from the steps, each time regaining his position with a struggle. At last, able to proceed with the service, he preached from the text, 'None of these things move me'.⁴ Four

¹ *Journal*.

² *Ibid.*, August 29, 1762.

³ *Journal*.

⁴ *C. Wesley's Journal*.

days later at Sheffield he found that Methodists were as sheep among wolves; at six o'clock in the evening he began a meeting in the Methodist room. 'Hell from beneath was moved to oppose us.' As he stood at the desk, an officer contradicted and blasphemed him, and shortly after 'the stones flew thick, hitting the desk and the people'. The officer drew his sword and presented it at the preacher's breast. Charles Wesley fixed his eye on him, calmly saying, 'I fear God, and honour the King'. The man sheathed his sword and withdrew.¹ As the preacher left, stones were flung once more and he was hit in the face several times. He returned to the room, the mob following him and striving to pull the whole building down; in the end, scarcely a single stone was left upon another. Charles Wesley appealed to Justice Buck of Rotherham for assistance, but he got no help. Leaving Sheffield, he went to Thorpe and, walking down the street with David Taylor, 'stones, eggs and dirt' were pelted at them. David Taylor was wounded in the forehead; Wesley himself received no harm, but his clothes were covered with eggs and dirt.² During the summer he paid his first visit to Cornwall, and on Friday, July 22, at St. Ives 'an army of rebels, . . . like those at Sheffield', attacked the preaching house. 'They began in a most outrageous manner, threatening to murder the people if they did not go out at that moment. They broke the sconces, dashed the windows in pieces, tore away the shutters, benches, poor-box, and all but the stone walls.'³ Two days later at Wednock the local clergyman's mob assaulted him and his companions 'with sticks and stones', vowing vengeance on them for '*making such a disturbance on the Sabbath day*' and 'for taking the people from the Church'.⁴ According to the Mayor of St. Ives, 'the ministers were the principal authors of all this evil' by continually representing the Methodists 'as Popish emissaries and urging the enraged multitude to take all manner of ways' to stop them.⁵ On Monday, July 25, another attempt to stop Methodist preaching was made at St. Ives. Just as the service was commencing, 'news was brought that all the gentlemen were coming' in order to pull the house down. 'About half a dozen came first and threw eggs in at the window. Others cast stones to break what remained of the shutters. Others struck the women, and swore they would have the house

¹ *C. Wesley's Journal*.

² *Ibid.*, July 22.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Monday, July 25.

² *Ibid.*, May 27, 1743.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Sunday, July 24.

down.' Because of the increasing menace, the meeting that night had to be abandoned.¹

Back to Staffordshire at the beginning of February, 1744, Charles Wesley found the Methodists at Darlaston and Wednesbury in a state of great alarm. The brief time he spent in the neighbourhood was later described as 'two days in the lion's den'. On Sunday, February 5, he preached in the Bull Ring at Birmingham, and the mob 'rang the bells, threw dirt and stones all the time'. Though not seriously hurt by hurtling stones, he received several blows from the crowd hard at his heels.² In Nottingham on Shrove Tuesday, February 7, 'the mob assaulted us with dirt and stones, making us as the filth and offscouring of all things'.³

In the summer he was back again in Cornwall; on Tuesday, July 19, he wrote in reference to St. Ives: 'Here the mob and the Ministers together have pulled down the preaching house; and but a fortnight ago went round in the dead of night and broke the windows of all that were suspected of Christianity.'⁴ Of Penzance a few days later he commented that 'their Minister rages above measure against this new sect, who are spread throughout his four livings'. When James Dale appealed to this minister, the Rev. Dr. Borlase, a local Justice of the Peace, for protection against a rioter who had broken into his house and stolen some goods, the clerical magistrate answered, 'They may burn thy house if they will, thou shalt have no justice'.⁵

Apparently during the next two years Charles Wesley had a quiet time. But there was disturbance at Shoreham on September 16, 1746: 'As soon as I began preaching, the wild beasts began roaring, stamping, blaspheming, ringing the bells, and turning the Church into a bear garden.' The service over, 'the rioters followed us raging, threatening, and throwing stones'. On the way to a place of safety, 'Charles Perronet hung over me to intercept my blows'.⁶ Reaching Grimsby at three o'clock on the afternoon of Tuesday, January 6, 1747, he was 'saluted by the shouting mob'. At six o'clock he began a service in the Methodist room, when 'the floods lifted up their voice. Several poor wild creatures, almost naked, ran about the town, striking down all they met. The uproar lasted for near an hour.' Having attempted to drag him down, one

¹ *C. Wesley's Journal*.

³ *Ibid.*, February 7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, July 24.

² *Ibid.*, February 5, 1744.

⁴ *Ibid.*, July 19.

⁶ *Ibid.*, September 16, 1746.

of the rioters struck at him, but 'James Crawford received the blow on his face'.¹ At Devizes a few weeks later he found the enemies 'mustering their forces for the battle. They began by ringing the bells backward, and running to and fro in the streets, as lions roaring for their prey.' Expecting him at the home of Mrs. Philips, the curate and the mob 'broke open and ransacked her house'; with the idea of throwing him into a pond, they attacked the house where he and his companions were resting: 'The windows did they break to pieces, and tore down the shutters of the shop.'² Hiding in the house of a Baptist friend, he went next day to preach at the home of Mrs. Philips. The Mayor having gone discreetly out of the town, the ruffians were left to wreak their vengeance unbridled on the long suffering Methodists; they attacked the house of Mrs. Philips, much encouraged by the curate and two leading Dissenters; they brought a fire engine, 'broke the windows, flooded the rooms, and spoil'd the goods'. One of the congregation was dragged away and thrown into the horse-pond. Eventually the Riot Act was read, and the crowd dispersed for a time, but, returning, they attacked the back of the house. Acting in behalf of one of the 'gentlemen', another constable tried to pacify the throng by promising to take the preachers out of the town on their promising not to return; that pledge Wesley and his companion, Mr. Meriton, refused to give; they procured their horses and, leaving, were accompanied by the noisy rabble. 'Such fierceness and diabolical malice', declared Wesley, 'I have not seen in human faces. They ran up to our horses as if they would swallow us.' Mr. Meriton's horse was attacked by two bull-dogs and the rider thrown to the ground.³

On Friday, July 5, 1751, Charles Wesley met with violent opposition in Worcester. The crowd, evidently expecting him, had created a disturbance before his arrival. When he began his service, the mob interrupted him; 'But, in spite of their lewd, hellish language', he preached the gospel, 'though with much contention'. As the Methodists gathered for their meeting on the next day, 'the sons of Belial' came 'with their faces blacked, some without shirts, all in rags'. 'They began to stand up for the Church by cursing and swearing, by singing and talking lewdly, and throwing dust and dirt.' When the

¹ *C. Wesley's Journal*, January 6, 1747.

² *Ibid.*, Tuesday, February 24, 1747.

³ *Ibid.*, February 25, 1747.

Mayor was asked to stop these disturbances, he confessed he had no sympathy with Methodists; their Societies were unnecessary, he said, and they had done great harm to the nation.¹

In Norwich in August, 1754, he found rioters in great numbers; they had been incited by the attitude of the *Norwich Mercury* and a few local gentry. When he began to preach on Monday, August 5, the crowd 'stopped their ears, and ran upon me casting dirt and stones, &c. . . . For three quarters of an hour' he stood the insults, 'but it was fighting with beasts'.²

The two Wesleys were not the only Methodist preachers who suffered opposition and persecution. Many of their associates endured the same experiences, some of them even being 'pressed' as soldiers, John Nelson and Thomas Beard among those, 'for no other crime than that of calling sinners to repentance'. As a result of such treatment, Thomas Beard was stricken with fever; he was taken to a hospital in Newcastle, where his arm festered and had to be amputated; he never recovered from the shock, and died in hospital.³ Having a stronger constitution, John Nelson survived the rigours of the dungeon, and after a few months of life in the Army he was replaced by a substitute. A notice in the *Daily Post* no doubt had reference to him: General Blackeney's Regiment brought in several pressed men from the West Riding, 'amongst whom was a famous Methodist Preacher'. 'If the intention of his Preaching', the Editor sarcastically added, 'was really to reform Mankind, he can hardly have a better opportunity of exercising his Talent than amongst the new Recruits'.⁴

Thomas Maxfield, another Methodist preacher, tasted the bread of the dungeon in Penzance before being pressed into the Army, the Rev. Dr. Borlase being responsible in the main for his apprehension. John Wesley sought to secure his preacher's release, but it was in vain.⁵ According to the *Weekly Miscellany* of June 8, 1745, a Methodist named Tolly was pressed into the Army a second time at the Welsh Harp, Staffordshire. Described as 'only a Journeyman Joyner', he was charged with having 'done great mischief among the poor Colliers and Iron Manufacturers of those parts'. Most probably on that account the magistrates 'turned him over to the attending officer, who immediately coupled him to a sturdy Tinker, and sent him to

¹ *C. Wesley's Journal*, July 6, 1751.

² *Ibid.*, August 5, 1754.

³ *Works*, vol. 13, p. 280.

⁴ May 12, 1744.

⁵ *J. Wesley's Journal*, June 19-22, 1745.

Stafford Gaol for safe Custody'. Not content with the record of the news itself, the Editor of the *Miscellany* remarked that 'if his Majesty's Ministers and Officers knew what Mischief such Wretches do amongst the good Subjects, what Incendiaries they are in a Country, and what Destruction they bring upon Families, they would withstand the Golden Bait, and make such men fight as well as pray'. Not only was Peter Jaco pressed as a soldier at Grampound in Cornwall, but he was also 'kept under a strong guard for several days, without meat or drink'.¹ William Hitchens, another Methodist preacher, was forcibly taken into the Army. Writing to Wesley on February 28, 1757, he said he was apprehended at Bradford in Wiltshire.

Sometimes, in order to stop their activities, the Methodist preachers were treated as vagrants and cast into prison. Thomas Westell suffered that indignity at the hands of the notorious Dr. Borlase when the clerical magistrate sent him to Bodmin Gaol. But on that occasion the zealous clergyman had gone too far and Westell was released by order of Quarter Sessions. Another case was reported from Frome on Monday, May 27, 1745, when the *Daily Post* informed its readers 'that a Methodist of very ill Fame was lately apprehended there as a Vagrant and committed to Bridewell', the well-known prison at Bristol. More serious still were the charges preferred against the preacher at Keighley; the Rev. Henry Wickham ordered the local constable 'to convey the body of Jonathan Reeves to his Majesty's gaol and castle of York'. The Methodist preacher was not only 'suspected of being a spy', but was regarded also as 'a dangerous man to the person and Government of His Majesty King George'.²

With such examples of official and magisterial prejudice and bias, how easy for the ignorant mobs to resort to violence! Shortly after T. Westell had been bailed out of prison, judicial charges still pending against him, he endeavoured to preach at Gwennap, a place afterwards famous in Cornish Methodist history. As soon as he began the service, the mob 'rushed into the House, beat the Candles out, and then came up to the desk', apparently with the intention of seizing the preacher. Putting 'an old woman's hat upon his head', he escaped and hid himself in a field of oats. After destroying the Society house at Gwennap, the crowd surged to Stithian and attacked Mr. Milliard, another Methodist preacher. Shouting that they had

¹ *Arminian Magazine*, 1778, p. 544.

² *Works*, vol. 8, pp. 246-7.

orders from 'the gentlemen' to stop his activities, they made a rush at him. In the *mêlée*, he escaped from their clutches by hiding behind a fence.¹ Attempting to preach in Holme, near Manchester, on March 2, 1747, John Bennet was confronted with 'a Band of wicked, drunken men, with Clubs and Staves'; they had been brought together by the blowing of a horn; before they dispersed, they broke the windows of the house where the meeting was to be held, pulling off part of the thatch.² Peter Jaco in Warrington was attacked so viciously that blood gushed out of his mouth, nose, and ears.³

Perhaps Thomas Mitchell suffered more severely than any other Methodist preacher. On Sunday, August 7, 1751, preaching in Wrangle, Lincolnshire, two constables came up at the head of a fierce mob and pulled him roughly down; they escorted him to an inn nearby and kept him there for several hours. Meanwhile the parish minister was consulted as to what should be done to him. The preacher was thrown into a pool of stagnant water; seven times he was ducked and then covered with white paint. The thirst for vengeance was not quenched; Thomas Mitchell was dragged off to another pool, twelve feet deep, and cast into the middle; by this time he was unconscious and they fished him out with a long pole; he lay senseless and was put to bed by a friend, but out of that they hauled him, demanding that he should come no more to the place. He refused to give that promise and was put back to bed again. The advice of the local clergyman was sought again; a second time he bade them 'take him out of the parish'. In obedience, the preacher was forced from his bed, dressed in an old coat, and conveyed about a mile; left there exhausted, he crawled and struggled to the house of a friend and lay for several days in a critical condition. It must be added that, by order of the King's Bench, the clergyman had to pay rather dearly for his participation in the coarse and unseemly affair.⁴ Thomas Mitchell, undaunted, continued to preach in other places. At Hawkhurst in Sussex he was seized in the preaching-room and carried off to some local gentry, among whom was the parish minister. Rejecting their request to cease preaching, he was left to be abused and tortured by the mob, who covered him with dirt.⁵

¹ *Arminian Magazine*, 1778, p. 231.

² *Ibid.*, p. 472.

³ *Ibid.*, 1778, p. 544.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1780, p. 321. *J. Wesley's Journal*, August 15, 1751. *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, vol. 1, p. 53.

⁵ *Arminian Magazine*, 1780, pp. 324-5.

Thomas Lee, at Pateley Bridge in Yorkshire, during the year 1752 suffered the same sort of violence. On one occasion he was dragged into a house by the hair of his head, some members of the rabble jumping upon him and flinging him forcibly on a heap of stones. 'This', he declared, 'nearly broke my back. . . . Thence they dragged me down to the common Sewer, which carried the dirt from the town to the river. They rolled me in it for some time; then dragged me to the bridge and threw me into the water.' His wife, having come to his assistance, was attacked; she was struck brutally till her mouth began to bleed; they threatened to 'put her into the river' if she continued her activities. Her husband appealed to the Dean of Ripon for the protection of the law, but without result.¹ Once again, in the year 1760, he had to face violence. On March 24 at Newark the crowd 'took the pulpit out of the Preaching-house and burnt it in the Market Place'. A few days later, they threw at him 'a large quantity of eggs filled with blood and sealed with pitch'. When the affair was reported to the Mayor, three of the ruffians were bound over, but, returning from the Court, Lee was accosted by the crowd; they began to throw 'mire, clods of earth and stones in abundance'. When about to leave the town, he was dragged from his house, taken to the side of the Trent, and water was thrown over him. Covering him with white paint, they hoarsely sought to extract a promise that he would never return.²

Alexander Mather in 1757 had to face the mob at Boston in Lincolnshire. As he proceeded to the market-place one day to conduct a service, the crowd objected and began to throw squibs. Giving up the service, he was returning to his lodging when 'the dirt and stones flew like hail on every side'. As he crossed a bridge an attempt was made to thrust him down; there were shouts and cries, 'Ditch him, ditch him'. Dragged to a pond, he was only saved from ducking by the intervention of a gentleman of kindly manners, a Good Samaritan. Eventually the mob gathered dirt together from the kennels and hurled it into the evangelist's face. One assailant struck him violently in the back in an effort to knock him to the ground. Another threw a stone, hitting him on the forehead. At an inn where he sought refuge, the landlord repulsed him. Next morning,

¹ *Arminian Magazine*, 1780, p. 30. *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, vol. 1, p. 458.

² *Arminian Magazine*, 1780, pp. 142-5. *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, vol. 1, p. 465.

the whole behaviour reported to the magistrates, certain elements in the crowd had to answer for their conduct, but so harsh and severe were the physical effects on Alexander Mather that they remained for several years.¹

John Haime had served in the Army and proved his loyalty to the Crown, but he was arrested one day while preaching in Shaftesbury and sent to Dorchester Gaol on the charge of causing a riot. As in the Acts of the Apostles, the preacher was not dismayed, joyfully he preached to those in prison. Hearing that some person in London had sent money for the purpose of employing an attorney and counsel in his behalf, the magistrates grew alarmed and ordered his release, but not before he had served eight days in the dungeon.²

One evening at Yeadon in Yorkshire, William Darney was attacked by the mob while conducting a service. Encouraged by the curate of Guiseley they threw eggs in the preacher's face, 'pulled him down, dragged him out of the house on the ground and stamped upon him'. But worse treatment was meted out to his successor, Jonathan Maskew. 'They soon tore off his cloaths, and dragged him along upon his naked back, over the gravel and pavement.' Thomas Mitchell was treated in a similar manner: 'They stoned me for nearly two miles,' he declared, 'so that it was several weeks before I got well of the bruises I then received.'³

Most of the early preachers had to endure hardness and harshness. Some, it was said, continued preaching, 'while the blood ran down their faces by the blows and pointed arrows thrown at them'.⁴ Thomas Hanby, at Ashbourne in 1754, was attacked by the mob, but friends who accompanied him received the worst blows and bled profusely.⁵ At Leek sticks and stones were thrown at him, and as he passed through the midst of the populace they cried out, 'Kill him! Kill him!'⁶ At Ashby-de-la-Zouch he was insulted several times. One night the windows and shutters of the house where he was preaching were shattered and broken. Fearing further violence, he took refuge in a shop; they forced an entry and he eluded them by jumping over walls and fences into the fields.⁷

¹ *Arminian Magazine*, 1780, pp. 149-52. *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, vol. 1, pp. 265-9.

² *Arminian Magazine*, 1780, p. 310. *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, vol. 1, p. 128.

³ *Arminian Magazine*, 1780, p. 317. *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, vol. 1, p. 49.

⁴ *Arminian Magazine*, 1780, p. 511. *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, vol. 1, p. 196.

⁵ *Arminian Magazine*, 1780, p. 546. *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, vol. 1, p. 206.

⁶ *Arminian Magazine*, 1780, p. 546.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 547. *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, vol. 1, p. 202.

Relating not only his own, but also the experiences of his fellow preachers, Christopher Hopper declared that the common cry in almost every town and county was, 'Press them for soldiers; send them on board a man-of-war; transport them; beat them; stone them; send them to prison or knock out their brains, and despatch them at once; for there is no law for them'.¹ 'Sometimes I was saluted with blows, stones, brickbats and bludgeons. . . . I sometimes lost a little skin, and once a little blood.'² At Kingston in Surrey on March 14, 1760, a rough gang invaded the barn where a Methodist was conducting service. 'A fellow threw some dirt at him . . . and the mob at last dragged the preacher into the street and rolled him in a ditch, and had it not been for the humanity of a gentleman near the spot, who took him into his house, he, in all likelihood, would have been murdered.'³

As soon as John Pawson joined the Methodists, he began to meet with persecution, his relatives threatening to cast him off unless he left those religious fanatics. After he became a preacher, he had to face 'almost continuous mobbing' at Norwich. 'The rioters frequently broke the windows, interrupted the preaching, and abused the people when service was ended.'⁴ At Nayland, near Colchester, 'the mob, being encouraged by the Church Wardens, were exceedingly violent. They assembled in great numbers before the house, having got a drum and a large quantity of horns, with which they made a prodigious noise.' Charged next day with causing a tumult, he was fortunate in finding a sympathetic clergyman, Dr. Tanner, Chairman of the Bench, and Pawson was immediately released.⁵

On Sunday, July 13, 1766, as 'Mr. Moore, a Methodist, was preaching to a numerous audience in the ruins of old St. Giles's he was attacked by a desperate mob who fractured his skull, and broke one of his arms'.⁶

Thomas Taylor, at Salop in 1767, was pelted with clods and stones. At other times he was kicked and goaded as if a wild beast. 'All the filth' his enemies could scrape together was thrown at him and they were times when filth was plentiful. Members of the crowds would repeatedly slap him on the face.⁷

¹ *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, vol. 1, p. 10.

² *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 14.

³ *Gent's Mag.*, 1760, p. 151.

⁴ *Arminian Magazine*, 1779, p. 38. *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, vol. 1, p. 338.

⁵ *Arminian Magazine*, 1779, p. 38. *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, vol. 1, p. 338.

⁶ *Gent's Mag.*, 1766, p. 339.

⁷ *Arminian Magazine*, 1780, p. 432. *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, vol. 2, p. 362.

At Paddiham in Yorkshire, the parish minister 'came at the head of a mob, in his gown and cassock; and dragged me down; . . . I mounted again, and again was jostled down. I attempted standing up a third time, but to no purpose; so we adjourned to the Preaching-house.'¹

James Rogers, at Whitby in 1768, was cursed one night with 'vollies of oaths, and showers of stones and dirt'. One of the rioters tried to hit him on the head, but the blow landed on his arm, sorely bruising it. Another hit him on the temple, causing him to reel like a drunken man; he nearly lost consciousness. A young girl who took his part was felled by a huge stone; for a time she lay on the ground seeming like one dead. 'She was cut in a most dreadful manner, having her cheek laid open to the bone.' Several of her friends were injured: 'One in particular had his face covered with blood; and his coat, waistcoat and shirt torn half way down his back.'²

Thomas Olivers had a strange experience when he came into conflict with a lord of the realm. The noble lord, 'Lord H-re-rd', apparently had some authority in the neighbourhood; when he wanted to show his dislike of the Methodist preacher, he threatened to put him in the stocks. Olivers in Yarmouth was prevented from preaching in the market-place and the mob encouraged the womenfolk to cast insults at him as he passed along the streets. 'They stood in their doors, some with both hands full of dirt, and others with bowls of water, which they threw at me as I passed by. When we got into the open street we had such a shower of stones, sticks, apples, turnips, potatoes, &c., as I never saw before or since.'³

In September, 1772, hostile reception was given to an apprentice who 'set up as a Methodist Teacher in a field leading to Stepney'. Ordered to move on by the owner of the field, he went to the 'Rope Walk', where a body of sailors, 'being elevated with liquor, swore they would hear no such Doctrine as Damnation. They therefore procured a wheelbarrow, placed the Preacher in it, and after running around the field several times, overset him in a pond.'⁴

On one occasion, when Mr. F. Valton was stationed in

¹ *Arminian Magazine*, 1780, p. 436. *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, vol. 2, p. 367.

² *Arminian Magazine*, 1789, p. 573. *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, vol. 2, p. 96.

³ *Arminian Magazine*, 1779, pp. 138-9. *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, vol. 1, p. 155.

⁴ *Daily Advertiser*, September 9, 1772. *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, September 10, 1772.

Manchester, he was greeted 'with stones and noisy instruments'. On his way to Oldham, the mob 'threw dirt and stones amain'. One of the women received 'a dangerous cut in her head'.¹ Mr. Richard Rhodda, on his second visit to Tenbury, was treated as Guy Fawkes sought to treat Parliament; some villains brought gunpowder and filled the Preaching-house with smoke.² On a third visit to the town, he was pelted with 'dirt and broken tiles'.³ In Hereford an ignorant man gathered dirt from the kennel and threw it in his face and eyes. He was so blinded that he couldn't continue his journey.⁴ At St. Germain's in Cornwall rotten eggs rained down on him, and the house where he preached was attacked.⁵

Perhaps the most ferocious attack in the history of the persecution of Methodists was in Staffordshire. When John Wesley first preached at Wednesbury, he was given a hearty welcome by the local clergyman, Mr. Embleton, who assured him that the oftener he came the more welcome he would be.⁶ But after listening to 'a vehement visitation charge' against the Methodists, and hearing that their preachers had publicly proclaimed against drunkards and assuming that the denunciation was levelled against himself, Embleton's attitude completely changed. He became most active both in public and private in stirring up the people 'to drive these fellows out of the country'. He was greatly assisted in his crusade by the minister at Darlaston and the curate at Walsall; at the same time he counted on the sympathetic attitude of the two magistrates, Mr. J. Lane and Mr. W. Persehouse. Charles Wesley, attempting to preach at Walsall on Saturday, May 21, 1743, found 'the street was full of fierce Ephesian beasts'.⁷ The beasts of Ephesus became more ferocious still when one night a few Methodists from Darlaston and Wednesbury met for fellowship at the house of Mr. John Adams. Having 'pelted them with clods and stones', they 'broke all the windows of the house'.⁸ John Adams, John Eaton, James Jones, Francis Ward, and a few other friends went to the home of Justice Persehouse to seek protection, but they were followed by a crowd of ruffians pelting them 'with dirt and stones'. Mr. Taylor, the curate of Walsall, stoked up the

¹ *Arminian Magazine*, 1784, p. 180.

² *Ibid.*, 1784, p. 414. *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, vol. 1, p. 411.

³ *Arminian Magazine*, 1784, p. 414. *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, vol. 1, p. 412.

⁴ *Arminian Magazine*, 1784, p. 416. *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, vol. 1, p. 412.

⁵ *Arminian Magazine*, 1784, p. 466. *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, vol. 1, p. 414.

⁶ *Works*, vol. 12, p. 78. ⁷ *C. Wesley's Journal*. ⁸ *Works*, vol. 13, p. 140.

crowd to flames of violence. Francis Ward was struck on the eye and dragged along the street. Others were injured by rough treatment. John Eaton, a local constable, tried to read the Riot Act, 'but the stones flew so thick' that he 'was forced to leave off reading and retire'. Finding vent in the breaking of windows, the crowd dispersed, only to flood back and damage the rest of the windows, together with a door and a clock.¹ It was the signal for a general attack upon the homes and shops of all Methodists; more than twenty-five houses had their windows broken, while several shops and their contents were spoiled.²

On John Wesley, in Wednesbury, October 20, 1743, the rage fell. The climax came at the beginning of 1744. According to the confession of Jonathan Jones, a mob visited him on January 13, compelling him by threats to supply them with ale and money. About this time Mr. Embleton was at the Sign of the Crown Inn and was wanting all Methodists to sign a declaration 'that they would never read, or sing, or pray together again, nor hear Mr. Wesley preach'. It was blackmail, sheer gangsterism. Those who refused were threatened with the destruction of their homes.³ Charles Wesley was in the vicinity during the first week of February and makes record in his diary that under mob law the threat was advertised of pulling down the houses and destroying the goods of local Methodists, some of whom were seriously perturbed and appealed to Charles Wesley for help. Accordingly, he advised them to resort to the magistrates, but those guardians of the peace treated them with scorn and ridicule, one declaring 'he would himself give £5 to drive them out of the country'. The other threw his hat into the air and cried, 'Huzza boys! Well done! Stand for the Church!'⁴

The way was opened for a concentrated attack on all Methodists. Reporting what took place on February 7, the *Birmingham Iris* said that 'a mob of some hundreds of people, men and women, were by Blowing of Horns, assembled together about Darlaston, who obliged everybody to 'join them,' and all who had been hearers of the above Preachers to walk at the head of them'. Marching to the homes of various Methodists, they requested them 'never to follow the same Preacher again, which being refused by many, the mob immediately broke

¹ *Works*, vol. 13, p. 140.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 143, 145. Also vol. 8, pp. 210-11.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. 13, p. 146.

⁴ *C. Wesley's Journal*.

their windows, went into their houses, took away what goods they could carry, and destroyed most of the rest'. 'They served some People at West Bromwich and Aldridge in the same manner.'¹ Referring to the affair, Mr. Sam Crossland, in a letter from Tamworth to Sir Thomas Abney on February 13, speaks of 'the lowest Rank of People' round the villages of Walsall and W. Hampton having 'taken it into (or it has been put into) their Heads that Whitefield the Methodist and his Disciples preach and propagate Doctrines contrary to and Destructive of the Established Doctrine of the Church of England'. After they had procured a list of those who sympathized with this preaching, 'between 3 & 400 men and women . . . went in a Body to the Houses of these unfortunate People which they plundered and carried away everything of value that was portable, and what they could not readily take away they destroyed in a Cruell and almost unheard of Manner. The damage already done by these Wicked people in Two Villages is computed at upward of £600.'

Two of His Majesty's Justices of the Peace for the county confronted these rioters and read to them the Riot Act; 'but had not the courage and Spirit to Exhort themselves. . . . So these Rogues plundered with impunity.' 'I am much afraid', added the writer, that 'they are spirited on to do Those Riotous and Wicked Acts by some of the higher Rank who Keep Behind the Curtain at present. As to their pretence of suppressing the Methodists, 'tis only a pretencè, for these Mobsters Seldom frequent any place of worship.' He shrewdly concluded his letter by expressing the belief that Sir Thomas Abney 'will think a Staffordshire Mob Comprised of Colliers Nailers and Brick Makers are But ill Judges in Matters of Religion'.²

A version vastly different was given by the *London Daily Post and Advertiser*: 'By a private letter from Staffordshire we have Advice of an Insurrection of the People call'd Methodists; who upon some pretended Insults from the Church Party, have assembled themselves in a notorious manner; and having committed several Outrages, proceeded at last to burn down the House of one of their Adversaries.' Answering this libellous report,³ John Wesley declared that 'without burning any house, or making any resistance, some hundreds of them, on Shrove

¹ February 13, 1744. Quoted by the *Wesley Historical Society Proceedings*, vol. 4, p. 13.

² S.P., 36, 63.

³ Published also in the *London Evening Post*, February 18, 1744. See *London Daily Post and Advertiser*, February 17, 1744.

Tuesday last, had their own houses broken up, their windows, window-cases, beds, tools, goods of all sorts, broke all to pieces, or taken away by open Violence; their live goods driven off, themselves forced to fly for their lives, and most of them stripped of all they had in the whole world. Ever since the 20th of last June', he went on, 'the mob of Walsall, Darlaston, and Wednesbury, hired for that purpose by their betters, have broke open their poor neighbours' houses at their pleasure, by night and by day extorted money from the few that had it, took away or destroyed their victuals and goods, beat and wounded their bodies, threatened their lives, abused their women (some in a manner too horrible to name) and openly declared, they would destroy every Methodist in the country.'¹ Adding to the indictment, John Wesley procured a signed statement from a large number of those who had suffered hurt and deprivation.²

To cite from that document: to Wednesbury they came on Shrove Tuesday morning, February 7, 1744, 'some armed with swords, some with clubs, and some with axes'. First they swooped on Benjamin Watson's house, broke many of the tiles, all the windows. Next they fell on Mr. Addenbrook's, smashed a fine clock and many other things, stole all they could carry away. Then Jane Smith's house was assaulted, windows were broke, her little hoard of goods were seized. To Mr. Bird's the human locusts swarmed and destroyed everything save what they carried off; even the beds were smashed into pieces. Mr. Edge was ill of a fever; so for bargain in the shape of a sum of money they passed his place by. At Mr. Hands's they broke up the counter, the boxes, the drawers; they spilled the drugs and medicaments, stealing what they could, 'even all his and his wife's wearing apparel'. At Mr. Eaton's 'they broke all the windows, and all the inside doors in pieces, cut the lead off his house, destroyed or stole whatever they could lay hands on. Some gentlemen offered to stop them if he would sign a paper implying that he would never hear those Parsons more.'³ In addition, they 'entered the house of Francis Ward, broke down the fire-grate fixed therein, and then pulled down, took, and carried away all such goods as were left there'. At Benjamin Constable's they 'broke to pieces all the windows of his house, plundered the same from top to bottom, broke to pieces many of his goods, and carried a great part of them away'.⁴

¹ *Journal*, February 18, 1744.

² *Works*, vol. 13, pp. 139-59.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. 8, p. 213.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 13, p. 150.

On the same morning at West Bromwich Mr. and Mrs. S. were forced to flee from their home through fear; none of the neighbours dared to offer hospitality and refuge; the fugitive had to stay in the fields.¹ The locusts promised Sarah Sheldon that 'not a penny-worth of her goods should be hurt' if she would leave these Methodist people. When she made no reply, they 'began breaking and plundering the goods'.² Before the end of that mischievous day, most of the Methodists had suffered household ruin. Assessing the damage, John Wesley calculated that over £500 worth of property had been destroyed in thirty-three homes, Benjamin Constable suffering the greatest loss, at £103, but five others reckoned their loss at £40 each.³

The quiescence, not to say indifference and unconcern, of the local magistrates in regard to the disturbances contrasted suspiciously with the judicial vengeance, including death sentences, inflicted on those accused of offences much less serious in degree and extent. And the contrast with the energetic action taken by magistrates to suppress mob agitations for increases in wages is cynically remarkable. One law for the poor, another for the rich: it was more than that; if the poor in mob fashion sought to sweep the Methodists and their homes and hearths and businesses away, smashing down everything, then the destructive passion was welcomed tacitly, it would seem, but if the masses agitated angrily and openly for social, economic betterment the so-called laws were used like a slave-driver's whip. Here is a quotation from the *Gentleman's Magazine*, February 28, 1744: 'A mob of nailors consisting of several thousands, having got together in *Staffordshire* in order to raise their Wages, and having proceeded to plunder Houses, the Mayor of *Walsall* assembled the Populace of that Town, led them out, and entirely defeated the other mob; after which he took away their Plunder, and made Proclamation that People might have their goods again.'⁴

On May 6, 1745, the Methodists were leaving their preaching room in Exeter when the mob pelted them with mud and potatoes, and covered them with dung. Some of the innocent worshippers were flung to the ground, trampled upon, badly beaten; many fled 'without their hats and wigs, others without their coats, or half of them torn off'. The women were treated in a shameful and disgusting manner. 'Some were lamed, others stripped almost naked and rolled . . . in the Kennel, besmearing

¹ *Works*, vol. 13, p. 154.

² *Ibid.*, p. 156.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁴ P. 107.

THE GROWTH OF METHODISM

their faces with Lamp black, Flour and Mud. This they continued till twelve at night.¹ In 1763 the preaching-house at Wolverhampton was destroyed and the homes of many local Methodists were gutted.² A few years later the Clifton Society near Deddington in Oxfordshire ceased to meet because of the violence of the mobs. At Barford on one occasion the rabble threw 'dirt, stones, and snow balls' into the preaching-room during the service. Threatening to throw the preacher into the river, they did later carry out the threat, one of the leading officials being the victim. He was kept in the water for a time and then his face was besmeared with mud and filth. Not content, they hurled him off to another pond about a mile away and gave him a second ducking. The man became seriously ill and remained in that condition for a long period of time. It is on record, too, that the persecution at Deddington grew to such severity that the Society had to be abandoned.³ But closing down as at Deddington was a rare occurrence. Methodism continued, not only to flower from floods and tempests, but also to strengthen its roots in its native soil. Persecution buttressed the sincere and faithful, gave them a deeper and more joyous appreciation of the anchor that enters within the veil and of the city which hath foundations and the things which cannot be shaken. By the end of the century, though opposition was experienced in many centres, the Methodists had found secure foothold in the life of Britain and were destined to grow in civic regard and national esteem.

¹ *Wesley Historical Society Proceedings*, vol. 4.

² *Arminian Magazine*, 1780, p. 158. *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, vol. 1, p. 273.

³ *Methodist Magazine*, 1800, p. 88.

CHAPTER III

THE PROGRESS OF THE METHODISTS

THE Methodist leaders repeatedly declared that they did not intend to form a new sect. Before the end of the century, the very thing they did not design had become an established fact. John Wesley often warned his supporters against this eventuality, earnestly advising them to cling to the Anglican Church. When he found a tendency to ignore his counsel in this matter, he uttered the vivid threat: 'If ever the Methodists in general were to leave the Church, I would leave them.'¹ A few years later he even more vividly avowed: 'When the Methodists leave the Church . . . God will leave them.'² But the bias away from the Establishment became stronger and the momentum swifter. Perhaps Wesley feared the ultimate defeat of his cherished ambition when he published this famous statement: 'I live and die a member of the Church of England. . . . None who regard my judgment or advice will ever separate from it.'³ Yet it was his genius and destiny to make possible the formation of a new Church. The organization of the Societies with leaders and 'stewards', lay officials and preachers, created a system over which the bishops had no control and a separate denomination was almost bound to grow.

Reforming the nation had made but small apparent progress by the end of the century. Parliament remained unregenerate, and agitation for amendment tended to be hushed, if not stifled, by the turn and phase of horror taken by the French Revolution. Defenders of things as they were in England boasted about 'exact justice' as if it were in operation, but it was still possible for 'two niches in a stone wall' to send two representatives to the House of Commons, while vast districts and new towns were without any direct representation. The social life of the nation had deteriorated, although fresh industries flourished and national wealth increased. If there were no parks, no amenities for adults, no playgrounds and few pleasures for children of the poor, it could scarcely matter: adults and

¹ Letter to Joseph Taylor, January 16, 1783, Tyerman, *Life of Wesley*, vol. 3, p. 391.

² Letter to Samuel Bardsley, March 25, 1787, Tyerman, *Life of Wesley*, vol. 3, p. 490.

³ *Works*, vol. 13, p. 241.

adolescents were hard-driven; of leisure there was little; hours of work were cruelly long and exhausting; the wolf was ever at the door; disease and distress were rampant.

The working classes were at the mercy both of the 'iron law of wages' and the capricious wills or tempers of stern employers. Towards the end of the century, the prices of foodstuffs had risen rather swiftly and sharply, but the standard of wages had scarcely altered. In many branches and phases of industrial life wage-earners felt compelled by the sheer weight and pressure of their burdens and problems to form themselves into protective associations, sometimes called 'trade unions' or 'friendly societies'. Landowners, property-owners, employers of labour forced Parliament to declare such coming together illegal. It was easy then for the masters to find pretexts either to reduce wages or prevent rises, to exact long hours, to engage the weakest and cheapest forms of labour, to enlist children as machine-fodder under the guise of teaching them a trade, to be indifferent to conditions of employment.

As for 'justice' and the judiciary, no improvement was manifest. In fact, matters were worse. More numerous than ever were offences involving the death sentence, more trifling the transgressions which might lead to transportation. Despite William Pitt's proud affirmation that the law of the land 'afforded equal security and protection to the high and the low, the rich and the poor', a boy of ten summers might be condemned to death and starving wretches almost forced to thieve in order to live might be banished for ever from their native shores. In the last two decades of the century, hangings increased considerably in number, as did transportations.

A sombre picture, but the leaven of the Methodist revival was active in the sordid lump. In response to Wesley and his preachers, thousands of poor folk pledged themselves to a life of abstinence from every form of evil and dedicated themselves to good works. Many in the Societies had been rescued and redeemed from drunken and criminal ways, and were determined to resist the temptations to return. A social conscience began to stir; there was a promise, a hint of daybreak in the national darkness.

Endeavours to reform the State Church appeared to have been abortive. 'Ambition, craving after preferment; avarice, grasping at income; nepotism, providing for clerical relations on the part of those who had the command of patronage' could

still be pointed to.¹ 'Grasping at income' must have been encouraged and intensified by the huge monetary rewards enjoyed by bishops in various sees. The Bishop of Durham, for example, even in the early part of the nineteenth century, derived an income of £17,800 a year. The Archbishop of Canterbury was slightly lower in the financial scale with £17,000. Agitation against the high stipends was stimulated and sharpened by the publication of the *Black Book*, the *Sins of the Clergy*, and the *Legacy to Parsons*; a Government Committee in 1836 recommended a big reduction in the salaries of the bishops. Durham was asked to surrender £9,800 a year, Ely £5,500, Winchester £3,700, St. Asaph £3,800, London £2,200, Canterbury £2,000, and Worcester £1,500. Even with these prunings, the emoluments were rich and large. Canterbury had £15,000 a year, London £10,000, Durham £8,000, Winchester £7,000, Ely £5,500, St. Asaph £5,200, and Worcester £5,000.²

There were the twin evils of absenteeism and pluralism. William Cobbett, in his *Legacy to Parsons*, revealed the striking fact that '332 parsons shared 1496 parishes and that another 500 clergymen held 1,524 more livings'.³ A report published in 1827 showed that there were in the country 6,120 non-resident clergy against 4,413 resident.⁴ What of the degrading conduct of certain of the clergy? One authority has declared that 'some of the most distinguished coxcombs, drunkards, debauchees, gamblers who figure at places of resorts, were young men of sacerdotal orders'.⁵

But the life of the Established Church as a whole was decidedly higher. Into many parishes a new vitality had come like a health-giving and wholesome stream. On the advice of John Wesley himself, Methodists went regularly to the services of the Church, partaking of the Holy Sacrament at every opportunity. The Methodists for the most part had their own weekly preaching services, their class meetings, and sometimes their prayer fellowships. This religious zeal and faithfulness did at times give fresh light and fire to the work of local clergy. Grimshaw of Haworth, Fletcher of Madeley, Perronet of Shoreham, Venn of Hudders-

¹ Stoughton, *Religion in England*, 1800-1850, vol. i, p. xvi.

² Second Report on the State of the Established Church, 1836, *Par. Papers*, vol. 36, p. 3.

³ Whitley, *Wesley's England*, p. 338.

⁴ Report on Resident and Non-resident Incumbents for the year 1827, *Par. Papers*, 1830, vol. 19, p. 3.

⁵ Stoughton, *Religion in England*, 1800-1850, vol. i, p. 339.

field, and many others can be cited as examples. According to one authority, upwards of two hundred ministers of the national Church were in sympathy with John Wesley's evangelical labours. 'Some of these took part in the work of his circuits and in the conversation of his Conferences; some were his companions in travel, and others his correspondents; some showed him hospitality, and others opened their pulpits to him.'¹ By 1788 more than five hundred clergymen were infected with the Methodist enthusiasm. Before the end of the century an Evangelical movement had begun in the Church itself, fire kindling fire. The Clapham School was formed and in association were a number of wealthy men, earnest and distinguished in evangelical and philanthropic labours. Missionary societies, Bible societies, the emancipation of the slaves, the growth of social conscience and awareness came to pass. The heaven was destined to work outwards in manifold ways.

Methodist influence and example began to work among the Dissenting denominations; they received a new lease of life; the numbers in fellowship increased. John Wesley refrained from calling his followers Dissenters, for the term ran counter to his heart and desire, but in actual practice they became so, the attitude of Church and State being what it was. Within ten years of Wesley's death, Methodism had very definitely become a non-Anglican religious community. It claimed to be midway between the Church and Dissent, but in reality it was outside the Church and inevitably akin to the Dissenting denominations. It was classified and treated in that relationship by the State; when the Tractarian Movement began in the Church of England, it was natural that Methodism should draw closer to the Three denominations.

Methodism was openly and vividly successful in building up numbers and influence. The ultimate independence of Methodism, as things turned out, was latent and implied in 1739 when John Wesley, in response to the call of George Whitefield, preached in the open air at Bristol. The previous activities of these two ordained ministers of the Church of England can be regarded as tending to this particular and most memorable event. In Bristol John Wesley found a number of religious societies already in existence; immediately he undertook the work of superintending them. Desiring to provide better accommodation for the Societies at Baldwin Street and

¹ *Wesley Historical Society Proceedings*, vol. 8, p. 26.

Nicholas Street, he purchased a piece of ground at the Horse-fair. The foundation stone was laid on Saturday, May 12, 1739; in his *Journal* he wrote that he 'had not at first the least apprehension or design of being personally engaged, either in the expense of this work, or in the direction of it; having appointed eleven feoffees, on whom . . . these burdens would fall'. But some friends in London, and Whitefield in particular, avowed 'they would give nothing, or have anything to do with it unless he discharged the feoffees'. Yielding to persuasions, he 'took the whole management' into his own hands. What he did was to add the first material asset to Methodism, the first house made with hands. The Societies at Bristol continued to grow in size and reputation, and in due course they were divided into smaller sections called 'bands', each with a leader. Having extended his open-air activities at Bristol, Bath, Pensford, Kingswood, and Clifton, John Wesley returned to London on Wednesday, June 13. The following day he accompanied George Whitefield to Blackheath, where a crowd of twelve to fourteen thousand had gathered for a service in the open. Wesley was taken by surprise when Whitefield asked him to preach; although 'nature recoiled', he acceded to the request. He preached again in the open air on the Sunday, to an audience of seven thousand at Moorfields, and to fifteen thousand on Kennington Common. A few days later he was in Bristol once more to resume outdoor preaching. His field of operations was enlarged by visits to Gloucester, Trowbridge, and Wells. By Friday, August 8, he is in London and during the next few weeks preached several times at Moorfields and Kennington Common, the congregations swelling to twenty thousand.¹

Such activities were the prelude to a notable episode in November. John Wesley records that two gentlemen, Mr. Bull and Mr. Watkins by name, had besought him several times 'to preach in a place called the Foundery, near Moorfields. With much reluctance', he at length complied. Very soon afterwards he was pressed to take the place into his own keeping. Securing a loan of £115, he entered into possession of the premises.² Quickly his first Society in London was formed, eight or ten persons 'who appeared to be deeply convinced of sin and earnestly groaning for redemption' desiring him to spend some time with them in prayer. He agreed to spend every Thursday with them in such exercise. 'This', he afterwards declared, 'was

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¹ *Journal*, September, 1739.

² *Works*, vol. 8, p. 37.

the rise of the United Society, first in London, and then in other places.¹

A few months later the London Society was augmented by a split in the Fetter Lane Religious Society. A feeling of tension had existed there, and the climax came on Sunday, July 20, 1740, when John Wesley read a carefully prepared paper defining his position and that of his brother Charles; he desired all who agreed with him to follow him out of the room. About twenty responded; the number was increased next day to seventy-two, forty-seven women among them.²

In the course of the next eighteen months, Bristol and London the main centres of operations, John Wesley's self-created parish or diocese took on wider geographical scope. By the end of 1741 it stretched from Deptford to Nottingham and Leicester, from Gloucester to Exeter and Wales.

Seventeen hundred and forty-two is a year important and notable in Methodist history. In Bristol, on February 15, the members of the Society met to consider how best to remove the debt remaining on the building; they agreed to contribute a penny a week each entirely for that purpose. To enable these weekly pence to be collected easily and regularly, the members decided to divide themselves into classes of about twelve each and to appoint leaders to be responsible for the receipt of the class moneys from each group. The arrangement proved good and was adopted by the London Society. In due course, the pattern and the technique prevailed among the other Societies. The system of classes and class moneys became a characteristic of Methodism everywhere and has remained for over two hundred years.

One of John Wesley's converts in London, John Nelson, had returned to the place of his nativity, Birstal in the West Riding. There he established a number of preaching centres in the neighbourhood. On Wednesday, May 26, Wesley went to visit him and used the occasion to preach at Birstal Hill and Dewsbury Hill.³ Two days later he arrived in Newcastle and preached to an eager crowd at Sandgate. On a pilgrimage back to Bristol, he conducted open-air services at several points and places. Refused the use of Epworth Church, where his father had been Rector for so many years, he preached a sermon from his father's grave to a large multitude. He gave a series of dis-

¹ *Works*, p. 269.

² *Journal*, Sunday and Wednesday, July 20 and 23.

³ *Ibid.*, May 26, 1742.

courses at Donnington Park, Milburn, Evesham, Painsworth, Stroud, and Hampton Common, arriving in Bristol on Monday, June 28, but before the end of the year he was back again in Newcastle-on-Tyne: 'The Grace of God flows here with a wider stream than it did at first either at Bristol or Kingswood.'¹ A week later, even more jubilantly he wrote: 'I never saw a work of God, in any place, so evenly and gradually carried on. It continually rises step by step.'² So in Newcastle he purchased a plot of land on which the third Methodist meeting-place arose. By the end of 1742 Methodism had four vital centres of evangelism, Bristol, Kingswood, London, Newcastle-on-Tyne. Societies had been formed in Somersetshire, Warwickshire, Nottinghamshire and South Yorkshire.³ After another flying journey to Bristol, John Wesley returned to Newcastle early in 1743. Then and there it was that he promulgated to his followers a code of rules requiring them to resist every evil, do good, and attend the ordinances. The date was March 6, and Wesley 'desired every one seriously to consider whether he was willing to conform thereto or no'.⁴ Failing to reach the required standard, sixty-four were removed from the membership; the total of such removals reached seventy-six in eight weeks. In May the rules first laid down on the Tyne were published under the joint signatures of John and Charles Wesley; Methodists everywhere were required to accept and obey.

Throughout the whole of 1743 the two Wesleys continued to extend their missionary efforts. From the time of the Holy Club in Oxford, Charles Wesley had worked in close association with his brother John. Charles had preached in many Anglican churches in London until deprived of the opportunity; rather than be dumb, he overcame his prejudice and reluctance and began to proclaim the gospel in the open air. After preaching to ten thousand at Moorfields on Sunday, June 24, 1739, he wrote with glad satisfaction in his *Journal*: 'My load was gone, and all my doubts and scruples.' In Gloucester two months later he asked for the use of an Anglican church before venturing 'into the streets and highways. . . . The Minister (one of the better disposed) sent back a civil message, that he would be glad to drink a glass of wine . . . but durst not lend . . . his pulpit for

¹ *Journal*, November 18, 1742.

² *Ibid.*, November 25, 1742.

³ *Works*, vol. 13, p. 295.

⁴ *Journal*, March 6, 1743.

fifty guineas.’¹ On September 22, 1740, he strove without success to prevent the Kingswood miners from marching to Bristol to demonstrate their grievances. He devoted a large measure of his time and care to the felons at Newgate in London. On Friday, May 20, 1743, he went once more among ‘our dear colliers of Wednesbury’. Preaching in Walsall the following day, ‘amidst the noisy greetings of our enemies’, he stood on the steps of the market-house and expounded the text, ‘But none of these things move me.’ Visiting Sheffield, Thorpe, Newcastle, Nottingham, and other places, he went to Cornwall where a few weeks later his brother John arrived. They met with fierce opposition, but in due time strong Societies were established at many points. Charles Wesley continued his journeys until 1757, and then settled in Bristol, where he served the Methodist cause. Ultimately he took up residence in London, where he ended his days; to the close of his life he asseverated his loyalty to the Established Church, though ministering to the Methodists.

The year 1744 was difficult, because of the volume of violence which had to be faced by Methodist preachers, but progress was registered in every quarter, most notably in Yorkshire, Staffordshire, and Cornwall. Increasing success brought fresh responsibilities, and John Wesley called a few friends to a Conference. The discussions proved to be of value, and the experiment was repeated in the following year. It became, in fact, annual, gaining in numbers and influence. At length full-grown, the governing body of the Movement, the Conference, emerged with legislative and administrative powers. The signing of the Deed of Declaration in 1784 acknowledged Conference as the supreme and final authority in Methodism. One condition was incorporated and it was an act of tribute. The brothers, John and Charles Wesley, were given the right to exercise their traditional authority for the rest of their lifetime.

Among the members of the first Conference were a few laymen whom Wesley had been using as preachers. Their presence at that assembly clearly marks the importance placed on their services. Thomas Humphrey has been described as the first lay preacher of Methodism, though John Wesley regards John Cennick as the first.² Thomas Humphrey began to preach in the year 1738. John Cennick became a preacher in the year following. Thomas Maxfield was engaged in a similar capacity

¹ *C. Wesley's Journal*, August 25, 1739. ² Tyerman, *Life of Wesley*, vol. 1, pp. 274-6.

in 1740. Wesley appears to have been annoyed when first he heard that Maxfield had begun to preach. This zealous layman had been permitted to exhort the members of the Society at the Foundery; but one day, without sanction, he began to preach to the people. John Wesley hurried to London intending to restrain Maxfield, but Susannah, Wesley's mother, living at the Foundery at the time, strongly advised her son to examine the fruits and effects of the man's preaching. John Wesley took his mother's advice and afterwards exclaimed, 'It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good'.¹ Thereafter Wesley began to employ laymen where ever possible. Some of them became 'itinerants' and with the progress of Methodism both local preachers and travelling preachers were more numerously engaged. By the end of the century, the value and indispensability of both classes were acknowledged.

The year 1746 saw a further important advance in Methodist organization. Already the various members were organized into bands, classes, Societies, with various officers, such as ministers, assistants, leaders, stewards, trustees, visitors, and local preachers. Appropriating a judicial term, the Conference of 1746 formed the existing Societies into groups called 'Circuits' or 'Rounds'. If a map had been published with the Circuits marked on it, it would have revealed the geographical range and extent of the movement at that period. '1. London, which included Surrey, Kent, Essex, Brentford, Egham, Windsor and Wycombe. 2. Bristol, which included Somersetshire, Portland, Wilts, Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire. 3. Cornwall. 4. Evesham, which included Shrewsbury, Leominster, Hereford, and from Stroud to Wednesbury. 5. Yorkshire, which included Cheshire, Lancashire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Rutlandshire, and Lincolnshire. 6. Newcastle. 7. Wales.' By this time the Wesleys had enlisted the help of about twelve to fifteen travelling preachers or assistants, who were attached to the various Circuits and given responsibility for management and improvement.²

Apart from their spiritual and administrative duties, these travelling preachers or itinerant ministers were given a prodigious physical task. Some of them had to do a round of some six hundred miles, preaching almost every day, often in the open, sometimes as early as five o'clock in the morning. On

¹ J. S. Simon, *Methodist Societies*, p. 25. Tyerman, *Life of Countess of Huntingdon*, vol. 1, p. 34.

² *Minutes*, 1746. Tyerman, *Life of J. Wesley*, vol. 1, p. 528. J. S. Simon, *Methodist Societies*, p. 324.

Sunday they would give three or four addresses. In the course of their duties and journeyings, they conducted various other meetings as distinct from the services for worship and exhortation; they visited the sick and suffering; they dealt with human problems; they exercised control and supervision over the Societies in the Circuits; they were missionaries in the sense of seeking to establish new Societies.

The next development took place on October 18, 1748, when the system of Quarterly Meetings was introduced. According to John Bennet, 'Four stewards were appointed to inspect into and regulate the temporal affairs of the Societies; every Leader brought his Class paper and showed what money he had received in the Quarter, which was fairly entered in a book for the purpose'.¹ John Wesley did not initiate the scheme, but saw the wisdom of it at the onset, giving it his blessing on its incorporation into the Methodist economy.

During these years John Wesley and his assistant preachers had been travelling the countryside preaching at all kinds of places and forming Societies wherever and whenever possible. Among a few of the older Societies, some failed to reach the required standards of conduct, and their names were taken off the roll of registered members. In Bristol Wesley found it necessary to apply the winnowing fan. Writing in his *Journal*, Saturday, October 1, 1748, he says: 'I examined the society . . . leaving out every careless person, and every one who wilfully and obstinately refused to meet his brethren weekly. By this means their number was reduced from nine hundred to about seven hundred and thirty.' At Kingswood on Sunday, October 9, he began examining the classes. 'Two persons', he confessed, 'had elapsed into drunkenness within three months . . . and one woman was proved to have made, or at least related, an idle story concerning another.'²

Despite the sieve, numbers in membership continued on the whole to grow. Yorkshire showed the best results, but in the North-East, the Midlands, and Cornwall the Wesleys had every reason to be satisfied with the progress. The river flowed on, and every year was broadened and deepened. By 1751 eighty-five travelling preachers were actively engaged. Two years later the Movement comprised twelve Circuits, Wales and Ireland having one each. In 1754 London had seven preaching places; six years later John Wesley speaks of the original Society there

¹ J. S. Simon, *Advance of Methodism*, p. 128.

² *Journal*.

as consisting of 'about three and twenty hundred and fifty members; few of whom', he proudly proclaims, 'we could discern as triflers'.¹ By this time, 'Methodism had been introduced into almost every county of England and Ireland; ninety itinerant preachers were acting under Wesley's direction; also a much larger number of local preachers, leaders and stewards'. In addition at least forty preaching-houses had been erected.² The two cities, London and Bristol, intimately associated with the beginnings, shared in the general progress. Of the former Wesley says: 'I found the work of God swiftly increasing here. The congregations in every place were larger than they have been for several years.'³ In Bristol a few weeks later he was pleased 'to observe a considerable increase in the work of God. The congregations were exceedingly large.'⁴ Satisfactory advance was reported from Kingswood about this time, the number in the Society being 'near three hundred'.⁵ By 1763 twenty Circuits had been formed in England alone. Two years later the number was twenty-five, six being in Yorkshire. Scotland had four and Ireland eight.⁶ The Conference of 1767 published for the first time the total membership in the Connexion; the figures were 25,911, an average increase of nearly one thousand per year. Yorkshire claimed 6,393, almost a fourth and approximately a third in all England.⁷

Numerical returns were published annually from 1767, but the Conference of 1768 was not satisfied with the progress reported. It recommended fresh efforts and energies, such as the distribution of more literature, the continuation of the preaching services at five in the mornings, the increase of field preaching, the formation of believers into bands, the changing of the stewards annually, the guarding against formality in singing, the more regular attendance at the quarterly fasts, and the constant advocacy of Christian Perfection. Preachers were exhorted to visit house-to-house more consistently, to meet the children every week, to read the lives of missionaries, and to go to Church regularly.⁸ It was at this time that the Methodists began to send missionaries to America, and by 1770 the number of Circuits in the Connexion was fifty, one of them in America. There were 29,406 enrolled members and 120 travelling preachers.⁹

¹ *Journal*, January 28, 1760.

² Tyerman, *Life of Wesley*, vol. 2, p. 391.

³ *Journal*, August 22, 1761.

⁴ *Ibid.*, September 21, 1761.

⁵ *Ibid.*, October 11, 1761.

⁶ Tyerman, *Life of Wesley*, vol. 2, p. 538.

⁷ Myles, *Chronological History of the Methodists*, p. 120.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁹ Tyerman, *Life of Wesley*, vol. 3, p. 70.

In the next ten years more than 22,000 were added, being an increase of over 2,000 each year. The increase might have been larger but for the apparent setback in 1778. Some of the larger Societies reported substantial decreases in the following year. The Conference of 1779 regarded this decline as due 'to prejudice against the King, and speaking evil of dignities . . . but chiefly to the increase of worldly mindedness and conformity to the world'.¹ There was great unrest in the country throughout the 'seventies and the Methodist Movement suffered. The decline in membership in the larger Societies was made up by increases elsewhere and a small gain was registered for the year.

John Wesley experienced much difficulty with some of the Societies. Norwich may be taken as an example. Much of the trouble there was due in the main to the baneful influence of James Wheatley. Gifted in many ways, this man, after being expelled from the Connexion for moral delinquency, continued to preach in the city; he won a considerable following and finally built a tabernacle for his weekly activities. Falling again into public sin, he was condemned by the Norwich Ecclesiastical Court in 1756 and ordered to undertake a humiliating punishment. Charles Wesley had been to Norwich in the August of 1754; received with showers of dirt and stones, he said it was like fighting with beasts.² On Thursday, December 21, 1758, John Wesley was in the city and preached in the chapel that had been vacated by Wheatley. On a second visit he found the Society, which had consisted of 'many hundred members, was moulded into nothing'. He sojourned and laboured for four weeks in the neighbourhood and the number in membership grew to 570, more than 103 of them not having been connected with any place before.³ Before the end of the summer he was back again in Norwich, only to find that the numbers had gone down once more. His language was blunt and direct; he 'told them in plain terms that they were the most ignorant, self-conceited, self-willed, fickle, untractable, disorderly, disappointing Society' he had ever met with in the three Kingdoms.⁴ Three months later, though fewer in number, he believed they had 'a more teachable spirit, willing to be advised, or even reproved'.⁵ Visiting them again on Friday,

¹ Myles, *Chronological History of the Methodists*, p. 142.

² *C. Wesley's Journal*, August 5, 1754.

⁴ *Ibid.*, September 3 and 9, 1759.

³ *Journal*, March 5 to April 2, 1759.

⁵ *Ibid.*, December 27, 1759.

October 15, 1763, he had occasion to read the rules, reminding them that only those who kept the regulations could stay in membership. 'For many years', he declared, 'I have had more trouble with this Society than with half the Societies in England put together.' Admonishing them severely, he promises to bear with them another year. Conditions were no better among them in 1764. Disappointed and dismayed, he exclaimed: 'I have seen no people in all England or Ireland so changeable as this.'¹ Recounting their instability, he recalled that in 1755 they counted eighty-three members; the number increased to 134 in the next two years, but declined to 110 in the following year. In 1759, after he acquired the tabernacle, the numbers went up to 760, but went down to 412 in the next two years, rising once more to 310 and falling to 174 in 1764.² Visiting the Society at intervals during the next few years, he confessed in 1781 that he had never found such fickleness anywhere else in the Kingdom.³

His beloved Society of simple colliers at Plassey in the North was in sharp sweet contrast with Norwich and gladdened the heart of the founder. Progress in Cornwall also gave him reason for rejoicing. Every time he went to the Duchy, his pleasure grew; among the tin-miners at Gwennap, from 20,000 to 30,000 souls would gather in the open air to hear him.

In the last ten years of his long and wonderful ministry, John Wesley experienced the joys of harvest. Persecution had practically ceased; instead of howling mobs to shriek and shout at him, he was welcomed almost as if he were a conquering hero. Many of the Anglican churches were open to him at last and when he preached they were filled with large congregations. Provincial newspapers reported his movements and eulogized his activities. It was natural that in this sunnier weather the Methodist Movement should grow in strength and stature. Methodism flourished in the land as never before. In one year the increase in membership amounted to 'nearly four thousand', and at the same time an increase of 6,849 was added in America.⁴ When John Wesley died in 1791, 'there were at least eighty thousand Persons under his care', an increase of more than 50,000 in the last twenty years. In that period Methodism had almost trebled its membership. If numbers in America were counted, then Methodists under Wesley's care

¹ *Journal*, October 11, 1764.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, January 17, 1781.

⁴ Tyerman, *Life of Wesley*, vol. 3, p. 498.

amounted to more than 120,000 and those attending Methodist preaching could be reckoned as four times more than the registered membership.

The Methodist organization was so firmly shaped and cemented together during Wesley's lifetime that few improvements were necessary after his death. One further development took place in 1791. The Connexion was divided into twenty-five Districts, seventeen in England. It was argued that the territorial arrangement was necessary 'to supply the want of Mr. Wesley's superintendence'.¹ The authority of Conference was not diminished; in reality it was strengthened by knitting the Circuits into closer texture within the Districts. By the end of the century, Methodists in the United Kingdom numbered 109,000, an addition of at least 80,000 in thirty years. If adherents were counted, approximately half a million people in Britain came under Methodist influence.

The 109,000 registered members were united by no loose bands, but by sacred promises to each other and to God, by voluntary submission to a set of regulations, by framework of Conference, Districts, Circuits, Classes. It was a closely-knit religious community with ramifications in practically every county and in a lesser degree in Ireland, Scotland, the West Indies, and America. Nothing quite like it existed anywhere in Britain save perhaps in a smaller way the Presbyterians. Even the Anglican Church, with a hierarchy of archbishops, bishops, sees, and parishes, the King himself nominally supreme head, was more loosely bound, strange as that statement may appear. Looked at as an example of large-scale organization, Methodism came into being a hundred years or so before the inception of large-scale enterprise in industry, commerce, and finance. It is very difficult to determine how far the Methodist pattern influenced or induced the other, but no doubt the example had some effect. Strong central government was a distinctive feature, first through the personal influence and status of the two Wesleys, then through the annual Conference, Divine sanction for such authority being derived from the experience of what God had wrought. Control was made effective by the system of Districts and Circuits. Loose threads and links were few. Whenever such were discovered, they were immediately rectified or removed; the sense of a sacred God-given mission pervaded and permeated the whole Connexion.

¹ Myles, *Chronological History of the Methodists*, p. 211.

As has been explained, the Societies from the early years were grouped into Circuits, and later the Circuits were clustered into Districts. From 1744 the annual Conference, inspired and guided by the Wesleys, exercised increasing control as the supreme parliament, and by the end of the century regulations and enactments were concerned with and applied to almost every detail in the far-flung communities of members and adherents. Such legislation, so to describe it, was made possible by the position and influence of the preachers comprising the Conference. Most of these were in control of the various Circuits, and through their fellow preachers and lay officers could make intimately certain that the injunctions of the central parliament reached the consciences and conduct of the people. Expulsion from the Connexion was the usual penalty for members who disobeyed, and the punishment was greatly feared and dreaded.

The system of business meetings assisted both in unifying the Connexion and in making supervision and control the easier. From the early years in Methodist history there were regular 'leaders' meetings', meetings for 'stewards', meetings for local preachers attended by the travelling preachers, and meetings for Circuits, to which many of the Society officials went. A number of the travelling preachers in normal attendance and close touch with local meetings, activities and feelings used to be present at Conference and became active members of the District Committees. Sufficient has been said to prove that the whole Connexion was organized from top to bottom and only Methodists who were loyal could receive and hold office. For the greater part the recruits were raw and untrained, but the process of weeding and sifting was regularly applied and the standard and quality of official and administrative efficiency were raised.

As to finance, in every Society the members were expected to contribute their weekly pennies to the funds of the Movement. From these funds the poor often received help, and gradually the support and maintenance of the travelling preachers was guaranteed; in due time, money was given with which to erect preaching-houses, to extend Methodism in new and difficult areas, to finance work overseas, and to ensure something in the nature of a pension for 'worn-out preachers', as the phrase was, a kind of insurance against sickness and old age.

The amount of religious activity engendered by the Movement

was very notable. Every member of every Society was pledged to certain forms of religious exercise. Usually he engaged to read the Bible regularly, even daily; to cultivate the habit of private and public prayer; to attend the weeknight classes, the band meetings, the 'love feasts', and the preaching services; to partake of the Sacrament at every opportunity; to be a missionary in the Methodist cause and to convert others to the way of life. As numbers grew so did these activities; by the end of the century their sum and effect were very considerable indeed.

The results achieved by Methodism in the face and teeth of violent opposition and in spite of tremendous difficulties may be regarded as trophies gloriously won 'not without dust and heat'. The physical difficulties demanded energy and endurance. The conditions of travel, for instance, were not such as to make the paths of pilgrims and crusaders easy. St. Paul enjoyed the noble and spacious highways built by the Romans. Not so John Wesley and his fellow missionaries. Of real roads there were but few. One town was linked to another by a rude track made by toiling wayfarers and the hooves of horses. A journey of any length was a perilous adventure. Yet John Wesley and his itinerants, not counting the local preachers, traversed thousands of miles every year for more than fifty years. In the course of the century transport by coach was introduced and greatly extended, but the travel was so slow that one enterprising enthusiast advertised a flying machine (really a coach) guaranteed to complete the journey from Leeds to London in three days! The normal time taken in the middle of the century to travel from London to York was about four days. It is estimated that John Wesley travelled on horseback more than 250,000 miles during his lifetime. The total covered by his travelling preachers must have been stupendous.

The erection of meeting-houses was always difficult. The raising of money for the purpose was far from easy, but the acquisition of land was usually a sterner task. In order to guarantee that the buildings would be used for the right purposes, John Wesley acquired in his own name the properties at Bristol, London, and Newcastle. Without financial backing, he took on the liability and the houses were erected. Finding the financial burden too great, eventually he appointed trustees to assume responsibility. As the Movement grew and spread, the need for buildings became ever more pressing and the number

of trustees increased. Wesley always claimed the right to preach in the houses and appoint others to do the same. Sometimes trouble arose. In Birstal the trustees tried to appropriate more power than Wesley thought good for the cause; there was a dispute and he was obliged to build another place. Later he had similar trouble with trustees at Dewsbury. In both cases he made a public appeal to the Connexion for financial support.

Difficulties came through the fickleness and uncertainty of the human factor and temperament and the clash of personalities. John Wesley had trouble with George Whitefield. For a time they worked together; then had a public quarrel, eventually going their separate ways with friendship not wholly broken, but its fires dimmed. The two Wesleys worked well together until 1757, when Charles first settled in Bristol, and later in London. But there were times and occasions when their relationships were rather strained; for one thing, Charles was a Churchman at any price, while John was ready at heart to sacrifice the Church for the sake of Methodism if that ever became really necessary, as he hoped and trusted it might not.

Nor did John Wesley always find it easy to control his preachers. Several of them needed a lot of patience if harmony were to be preserved; some of his most trusted helpers turned against him. Into that sad category fall John Cennick, Thomas Maxfield, John Bennet, James Wheatley, John Atlay, Alexander McNab; and there were others. Troublesome little foxes stole into the smaller vineyards, such as the class meetings and other gatherings. The amount of local trouble is indicated by the numbers taken off the rolls of members at Bristol, Newcastle, and Norwich, but these episodes only serve to show how intense and vital was the surging and expanding life and vigour of the Methodist Movement. The broad and general progress throughout the century was accelerated in the closing years.

'The wind bloweth where it listeth and thou hearest the sound thereof and canst not tell from whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth. So is everyone that is born of the Spirit.' A Divine energy was at work from the hour in Aldersgate when John Wesley felt his heart strangely warmed. The Spirit coming as the wind fanned the sacred flame.

The increase in population was a contributory human factor. No official figures were issued before 1801, but estimates of the total population in 1700 range between five to six millions. 'The population probably increased by a million and a quarter

between 1700 and 1760, and by two millions between 1760 and 1800.' Let us say, as we can with some confidence, that the population increased by 50 per cent. in John Wesley's lifetime.¹ Cunningham puts the number of people in England and Wales for 1700 at 5,475,000 and for 1801 at 8,892,536.² Toynbee expresses the opinion that before 1751 the largest decennial increase was about 3 per cent. For each of the next three decennial periods the increase was 6 per cent., between 1781 and 1791 9 per cent., for the period 1791-1801 11 per cent.³ 'In 1700 the five most populous counties are believed to have been Middlesex, Somerset, Gloucester, Wiltshire, and Northampton. In 1800 they were Middlesex, Lancashire, the West Riding, Staffordshire, and Warwickshire.'⁴ 'The cotton towns grew the fastest, then the iron towns, then the woollen.'⁵ 'During the century towns like Birmingham and Sheffield probably increased their population sevenfold, and Liverpool tenfold.'⁶ Similar increases took place in other towns.

Without an increase in population during the last sixty years of the century, it is certain that the history of Methodism would have been different. The fact is that Methodism made its greatest advances at the time and in the places where the population invariably showed the largest increases. During the first thirty years of its history, Methodism made an average advance of under one thousand a year; and in the next thirty years the advance averaged over two thousand a year. Between 1770 and 1780 the increase was over a thousand a year; in the next decade over two thousand a year; in the last decade over three thousand a year. In the last twenty years of the century Methodism added to its numbers over 50,000; it more than doubled its membership. During the same period the population in Great Britain made its greatest increase.⁷

It is scarcely a coincidence that Methodism recorded its biggest advance precisely in those places where the population showed the greatest rise and industrial developments were the most notable. In these respects the West Riding of Yorkshire was conspicuous and Methodism there enjoyed a very large growth. More than 25 per cent. of the total membership belonged to Yorkshire. Other counties in which industrial

¹ Whiteley, *Wesley's England*, p. 60.

² *Growth of Industry and Commerce*, vol. 2, p. 935.

³ J. L. and B. Hammond, *The Town Labourer*, p. 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁶ Whiteley, *Wesley's England*, p. 61.

⁷ Census Report, 1851, *Par. Papers for 1852-3*, p. 82.

developments had ensued were Cornwall, Derbyshire, Durham, and Staffordshire. In all these Methodism made great strides. According to one authority, Methodism in 1802 had 140 preaching places in Yorkshire and in Cornwall 100. In counties where Methodism had less than ten centres only two had felt the impact of industrialism and then but slightly.¹

The failure of the Established Church to provide for the spiritual needs of the new populations gave Methodism an opportunity. The personnel of the Establishment, with few exceptions, seemed placid, perhaps indifferent, in regard to the changes industrialism was bringing. An old order was passing and a new emerging. 'The Church of England was at its nadir during the reign of the first two Georges, and during the early years of George III. Convocation remained silent, and ecclesiastical preferments, invariably made to serve political ends, were regarded by clergy and laity alike as little more than desirable offices.'² 'During no other century of English history have those commissioned as, and purporting to be, the Apostolic Fathers and Chief Shepherds of the Fold of Christ, represented so materialistic an outlook, or so low a standard of spiritual discernment, as characterized the lives of the eighteenth century Primates.'³ 'So firm and so stubborn was the grip of political, materialistic and rationalistic influences on the highest offices of the National Church, and so bitter the resentment against the rising tide of "religious enthusiasm", that it was reserved to the latter decades of Wesley's crusade to experience the lowest degradation to which the Primacy fell.'⁴ On one occasion King George III found it necessary to rebuke Cornwallis, the Primate, because of the 'routs', the 'levities', and 'vain dissipations' held at the ecclesiastical palace.⁵ With leaders like these the National Church could scarcely be expected to be awake and alive to the needs of the new populations.

Many of the bishops had gained their position by influence rather than merit; the tendency was to hanker after preferment for the sake of worldly gain; passion for the spiritual well-being of the people was seldom manifest. Some of the bishops lived like princes. The enervation of riches might be said to be tropical; in such golden and luxurious listlessness, how could there be any depth and fire of concern, any sense of crusade?

¹ Census Report, 1851, *Par. Papers for 1852-3*, p. 323.

² Bready, *Before and After Wesley*, p. 43.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

Indeed, the bishops might not unfairly be described as playing the part of State policemen to keep the poor in their proper stations!

The machinery of the Established Church was not adaptable enough to meet the needs of the situation. The growth of new towns caused parish churches, charming and beautiful as they were, to be insufficient in size and number. No additional churches had been built for the growing districts. 'Practically nothing was done in this direction until 1817-19, when a million pounds were granted by Parliament for the erection of new places of worship.' As late as 1811 in the Parish of Marylebone 'there were 60,000 inhabitants while the seating capacity of the local church was only 900. That of St. Pancras was in the same predicament. In 1,047 selected parishes, each containing more than 1,000 persons, there was a total population of 3,460,560, yet the seating accommodation in the parish churches for the same area was approximately 1,054,231. Earl Stanhope about the same time estimated that 4,000,000 people in England had not the means of attending Church.'¹

In numerous townships where Methodism achieved most notable results the accommodation in Anglican churches was altogether inadequate for the residents. Manchester reported in 1817 a population of 100,459; the church accommodation was only 14,850. In Oldham the figures were 18,000 as against 1,700; in Stockport 33,973 compared with 2,000; in Walsall 9,389 and only 700; in Gateshead 8,700 and 1,116; Sheffield in 1819 had fifteen times as many people as the churches could hold; Leeds six times.² Statistics from a number of dioceses make an even worse showing. In York twenty parishes with a population of 402,000 had seating accommodation in the churches for only 48,000. Thirty-eight parishes in Chester had 816,000 inhabitants, and the total capacity of the churches was for 97,700.³ The Church of England at the end of the eighteenth century provided seating accommodation for 48·2 per cent. of the population the country over; it was admitted officially that where accommodation showed the smallest percentage there the Dissenters most increased in numbers. (At this time Methodists were counted as Dissenters and the statement runs true of them.) The inability of the State Church to meet the hunger and urge

¹ Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Working-class Movements*, p. 18.

² Report on Act for Building of Churches, 1821, *Par. Papers*, vol. 10, pp. 16-33.

³ *Second Report on the State of the Established Church*, 1836, p. 7.

of the new populations was a factor in the growth of Methodism.

The mentality of the common people must be recalled. Throughout the eighteenth century they were extremely credulous. 'The people as a body were steeped in fancies and superstitions. Every woman knew of the kindly spirits whose unseen hands helped on the household work, and for whom she left cups of cream and dainty bits; every mid-century miner knew of the "knocker", a goblin dwelling in mines and who indicated the presence of ore by knocking; every farm labourer believed in the fairies and lobs who turned his garden from a nursery of slugs and snails into a glowing patch of luxuriant blossoming.' It was supposed to be 'unlucky to weigh newborn babies or to cut their nails for at least a year'. 'If you marry in Lent, you'll live to repent' was a prevalent belief. 'From the marriages in May, all the bairns die and decay' was a further superstition. For some parents 'Christening was not simply a religious rite, but a cure for sickness, whilst confirmation to many was a specific against rheumatism. Their Good Friday Bread was preserved for months to be used as a medicine.'¹ 'Every district had its wishing wells, whilst local customs, feasts and pageants were redolent with ancient superstition. "Tom Poker", "Old Shock", "Jack o' Lanthorn", "Will o' the Wisp", "the Mawth Dog", and "Roger's Blast" were names of figures common in popular fancies and fears.'² 'Everything conspired together to render the people of this century superstitious.'³ Much that was enshrined in Shakespeare lived on and Puck was real. Wesley himself believed in supernatural disturbances; much has been written about the strange noises in his father's home at Epworth when he was a boy. 'The eighteenth century saw official belief in witchcraft.' Laws against witchcraft were repealed in 1736, but the general public still believed in it. 'In 1751 a publican at Tring accused an old man and his wife, who were over seventy, of bewitching him, and demanded that they should be tested to see if they could shed tears and were capable of being submerged in water.' Because of the menacing attitude of the mob which believed the publican's accusation, the aged couple were removed from the workhouse to the church for safety. The mob attacked, 'broke the workhouse windows, pull'd down the poles, demolish'd part of the town. So the poor wretches were at length, for public

¹ Whiteley, *Wesley's England*, p. 72.

² *Ibid.*, p. 72.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

safety, deliver'd up, stript naked by the mob, their right thumbs tied to their left toes and their left thumbs to their right toes, dragg'd along the road for two miles and flung into a muddy stream. After much ducking and ill-usages, the old woman was thrown quite naked on the bank almost choak'd with mud and expir'd in a few moments, being kicked and beat with sticks even after she was dead.'¹ In due course one of the ringleaders, Colley by name, was charged with murder and sentenced to death; after two or three reprieves, he was hanged at Gubblecut Cross on Saturday, August 24.²

Many other episodes are to be found in the newspapers of the time. In 1759 the *Gentleman's Magazine* reported the case of a woman charged at Aylesbury with bewitching her neighbour's spinning wheel. The *Daily Journal* of 1775 recorded events similar to those at Tring. Late in the century, 'the most popular cries in Lancashire were "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live"'.³

The belief in Satanic and malign incarnations was prevalent. The north side of a church in many instances was called the 'Devil's side'; the adjacent churchyard was known as the 'Devil's Knell'; the 'Devil's Round' was rung from many a belfry. Other terms in common usage were 'Devil's Dyke', 'Devil's Kitchen', 'Devil's Dressing Room', 'Devil's Elbow', 'Devil's Punch Bowl', 'Devil's Den', 'Devil's Cavern', 'Devil's Jump', 'Devil's Bridge'.⁴ A 'grisly crew of devils, vampires, sorcerers, monsters . . . witches, warlocks, banshees, &c., infected the countryside during the whole of the century'.⁵ In 1741 the *Weekly Miscellany* tried to hold the Methodists up to ridicule by reporting the story of a woman who believed she was pregnant of the Devil after listening to a Methodist boy preacher!⁶ The *Gentleman's Magazine* reprinted the same story.

In many parts of Britain waste and uninhabited land, infected with bogs, beset with hillocks and other suitable hiding-places, became to superstitious minds the habitations of spirits. The almost utter lack of education in the commonalty and the enforced isolation were fertile of credulity. Even the extremer and more vivid messages of Methodist preachers concerning sin and punishment, hell fire and eternal damnation, salvation and eternal bliss found swift hospitality in simple hearts and not infrequently resulted in emotional scenes and excitements. Be

¹ Whiteley, *Wesley's England*, p. 75.

² *Norwich Mercury*, July 27, 1751. *Gent's. Mag.*, 1751, pp. 375-8.

³ Whiteley, *Wesley's England*, p. 75. ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 77. ⁵ *Ibid.* ⁶ January 10.

that as it may, the nature of the message itself and the character of the Methodist messengers burn like beacons in the general darkness. Or, to change the figure and re-echo ancient words, the dayspring from on high visited them that sat in valleys of shadows. Couched in a variety of terms and presented in manifold ways, the centre and core of the message was the possibility of justification by faith, of salvation through belief in the Lord Jesus. The glory of it all was set to song by Charles Wesley. The preacher might often describe the awfulness of sin and the terrible wages in this world and the next; he might dilate on the fiery tortures eternally burning; but his was a passion for souls for whom Christ died on the wondrous Cross and rose again, the Christ whose redeeming love flowed on for ever.

John Wesley and his disciples believed themselves to be specially called to engage in the Evangel. With no buildings in which to assemble the hearers, they first went out into the open to proclaim the tidings of salvation for every man. Not since the days of the early Quakers had highways and byways rung with the message; the method was entirely new to the majority of the English people. The very novelty of service in the open fields, the earnestness of the preachers, their brave persistency amid persecution, the high nature of the message, the vernacular in which it was expressed, the solicitude for the individual, and the dignity of the destiny opened to all believers combined to make a profound impression on the mind and emotions of every hearer. Pentecost came to Britain.

The wonderful work of Methodist laymen has its part in the story of progress. As class leaders, stewards, trustees, and local preachers, they gave to the Movement the attractiveness of a constant and beneficent fellowship. They themselves, in positions of responsibility among the members and in regard to organization generally, gained experience in administrative affairs and grew in stature. Methodism provided opportunities for laymen without requiring impossible qualifications and without any sense of caste. It was one of the factors which gave a broad basis to the Movement in popular thought and favour, though winning the dislike and suspicion of the ruling classes.

Finally, tribute in the highest measure must be paid to the indefatigable labours of the two Wesleys, and more especially to John, whose indomitable spirit, unfaltering faith and courage and patient wisdom built themselves into an epic. One sympathetic writer has described the purpose of his life as that of

'doing good' like his Master. 'For this he relinquished all honour and preferment; to this he dedicated all the powers of body and mind; at all times and in all places, in season and out of season, by gentleness, by terror, by argument, by persuasion, by reason, by interest, by every motive, and every inducement, he strove, with unwearied assiduity, to turn men from the error of their ways, and awaken them to virtue and religion. To the bed of sickness, or the couch of prosperity; to the prison, or the hospital; the house of mourning, or the house of feasting; wherever there was a friend to serve, or a soul to save, he readily prepared; to administer assistance or advice, reproof or consolation, he thought no office too humiliating; no condescension too low, no undertaking too arduous, to reclaim the meanest of God's offspring. The souls of men were precious in his sight, and the value of an immortal creature beyond all estimation. He penetrated the abodes of wretchedness and ignorance, to rescue the profligate from perdition, and he communicated the light to those who sat in darkness and the shadow of death. He changed the outcasts of society into useful members, civilized even savages, and filled those lips with prayer and praise that had been accustomed only to oaths and imprecations.'¹

¹ Myles, *Chronological History of the Methodists*, p. 190.

Section Three

WHAT METHODISM DID FOR THE COMMON PEOPLE

CHAPTER I

IT MADE RELIGION LIVE

THE Methodism of the eighteenth century has often been described as the religion of the common people. John Wesley's instruction to his helpers was this: 'Go always not to those who want you, but to those who want you most.'¹ In obedience to that command, the poor had the gospel preached unto them and they made encouraging response; as and when Societies were formed they joined in membership and took part in the fellowship. Among the Dissenting congregations the merchants and the yeomen predominated, but among the Methodists the poorer classes were the majority. Largely on that account, the various agencies of Methodism had to be run on the thriftiest terms. At the outset John Wesley had to depend entirely on the meagre allowance of a university fellowship (£28 per annum); later on the sales of his numerous publications helped. In the early days his assistants received no income whatever, but such hospitality as the poverty-stricken Societies could afford was theirs. In due time Conference decreed that the assistants should receive a few shillings a week each. Preaching-houses had to be of the plainest type from lack of finance; sometimes generous donations were forthcoming, but the larger portion of the revenues came from the pennies of the poor. The whole Methodist economy throughout the century bore the marks and signs of the poverty characterizing the lives of the bulk of the members. Poverty was no bar, no ban, to membership and to office; the poorest were made most welcome. Wesley and his co-workers believed they had a special commission to minister to them, giving beauty for ashes and the oil of joy for mourning; emphasizing the love of God and the way of redemption, they brought into the lives of the struggling masses the message of

¹ W. W. Stamp, *The Orphan House of Wesley*, p. 2.

a Father caring for His children and serving them by means of human hearts and hands.

Never did the Methodists leave their audiences and congregations in doubt about the living reality of the Divine mercy. In almost every sermon it was preached; it was sung in hymns; the theme ran like music through all occasions. If the preachers dwelt on the terrors of hell, they never forgot to proclaim the offer of Divine mercy. Sufferings in the underworld were made realistic in order to make the way of salvation the more attractive and the Delectable Mountains more winsome. In season and out of season, men and women were urged to flee from the wrath to come by instant acceptance of the mercy that was boundless and free.

John Wesley's emphasis on this great aspect of the Christian religion was mainly due to his Evangelical conversion. Failing to find the joy and assurance of salvation in charitable works, religious exercises, and austere privations, he was persuaded by a German Moravian to seek with all his heart the acquisition of saving faith. He found it hard to enter fully into the experience, and was on the point of giving up his preaching when the Moravian said to him, 'Preach faith till you have it, and then, because you have it, you will preach faith'.¹ The very next day he followed his friend's advice and the first person to whom he offered salvation by faith was a prisoner under sentence of death at Oxford Castle. In less than three months Wesley had acquired the blessing he sought after with his whole heart and mind. It came to him at a religious meeting in Aldersgate Street, London. He wrote in his diary: 'I felt I did believe in Christ, that Christ had taken away my sin, even mine.'² From that time his preaching took on a new passion and his ministry a fresh significance. He and some friends decided 'To be Bible Christians, to preach with all their might plain, old Bible Christianity'; they came to the conclusion 'that Justification by Faith was the doctrine of the Church as well as of the Bible'. In 1779 he maintained that Charles Wesley and he had preached 'Salvation by Faith' for more than forty years. 'As soon as we believed we spoke; when we saw it ourselves, we immediately began declaring it to others. And, indeed, we could hardly speak of anything else, either in public or private. . . . It was our daily subject; both in verse

¹ *Journal*, March 5, 1738. The injunction has been erroneously described by Marjorie Bowen as 'an invitation to . . . self-hypnotism' (*Wrestling Jacob*, p. 191).

² *Journal*, May 24, 1738.

and prose; and we vehemently defended it against all mankind.¹

The doctrine of 'Justification by Faith', the foundation stone of the Protestant Reformation and the Pauline conception of the Christian way of salvation rightly understood, means, on the Godward side, the exercise of the Divine mercy, the granting of Divine forgiveness, and the proof of the Divine love; on the human side it means the simple acceptance of the death of Christ on the Cross as a complete sacrifice for sin and a continual trust in Him to keep the soul from sin.

When John Wesley began to preach the great doctrine in London churches he was tolerated only for a brief period of time. One after another began to bid him preach no more. On the express invitation of George Whitefield, he went to Bristol 'and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation'.² His first sermon in the open air at Bristol was from the text, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; to proclaim deliverance to the captive . . . to set at liberty them that are bruised.' Over three thousand people were said to have listened to his discourse. Two days later his text was, 'I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely'. More than seven thousand people listened to him the following Sunday. The text at one service that memorable day was, 'Come buy wine and milk, without money and without price'. On Saturday, May 26, a company of ten thousand gathered at Rose Green to hear him expound the passage, 'The Son of Man is come not to destroy men's lives, but to save them'. Three weeks later his congregation out of doors had risen to twelve thousand. Later in London the audience was larger still. Twenty thousand listened to him at Kennington on Sunday, September 9, on the text, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved'.³

Large and eager crowds thronged to hear him in other places. Of his first visit to Newcastle-on-Tyne on Sunday, May 30, 1742, he says: 'I walked down to Sandgate, the poorest and most contemptible part of the town, and preached on "He was wounded for our transgression"'. Later in the day he preached on 'I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely'. The tidings were new and joyful to them and they listened with rapture; 'after preaching the poor people were ready to tread me under foot out of pure love and kindness'.⁴ As he left the

¹ *Works*, vol. 11, p. 486.

² *Journal*, April 2, 1739.

³ *Journal*.

⁴ *Ibid*.

city on the last Thursday in December, 'both men and women and children hung upon me so that I knew not which way to disengage myself'.¹

John Wesley proclaimed that gospel and pursued that mission for over fifty years, laboriously travelling 250,000 miles at least. The unchanging and changeless mercy of the Divine love, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day and for ever, was his constant and most glorious theme. Many of his sermons were printed and sold at a cheap price. In due course he founded a monthly called the *Arminian Magazine*² so that he might publish 'Extracts and Original Treaties on Universal Redemption'. The periodical was sold at 6d. It won favour and has continued to be published without a break until the present day. In contrast with other journals, such as the *Spiritual Magazine* and the *Gospel Magazine*, which tried to show 'that God is not loving to every man', the *Arminian Magazine*, John Wesley announced, will prove 'that God willeth all men to be saved'. In one of the issues of the magazine a year or so after the first publication he claimed to have fulfilled the promise to publish 'some of the most remarkable tracts on the Universal Love of God and His willingness to save all men from sin', and he vowed anew to write on 'God's love to Mankind, manifested by disproving the Absolute Decree for their Damnation'.³ So impassioned and resolute and intent was he on preaching and expounding the 'Divine Mercy', 'the love of God to all mankind', 'free grace', and 'universal redemption', that he separated from one of his earliest and dearest of friends, George Whitefield. Their public disputation on that high matter was of immense significance.⁴

From 1739 onwards, with a crescendo of interest, the poor and oppressed in Britain listened in multitudes to the Methodist's pulsating and passionate proclamation of the Everlasting and All-Embracing Mercy.

And the preachers went into the prisons to make known the message there. Of mercy at the hands of the State the prisoners experienced but little; on the contrary they knew what harshness and ruthlessness meant; they were shut out from pity. Passing strange the evangel of mercy must have sounded at first to them who were crowded into dungeons, but the music of it stole into their hearts.

As early as August 24, 1730, the two Wesleys began to visit

¹ *Journal*.

² Renamed *Methodist Magazine* in 1798.

³ 1779, pp. 7-17.

⁴ See *Weekly Miscellany* and *Gent's. Mag.* for 1741.

the prisons. Invited by Mr. Morgan, a member of the Oxford Club, they went on that day to the City Castle, which was being used as the common gaol. They determined to visit the prisoners at least once a week. A little doubtful about the ecclesiastical propriety of the compassionate vow, John Wesley wrote to his father at Epworth to ask advice. To the credit of Samuel Wesley, the reply was to go on in God's Name, but seek the approval of the prison chaplain and the Bishop of Oxford.¹ The question of the regular visitation of prisons was discussed at a general meeting of the Oxford Club and the members agreed it was right and good.

On his return from America in the early days of 1738, John Wesley renewed the work in the prisons. The first recorded instance is that of Monday, March 6, 1738, when to a man under sentence of death he made known the doctrine of Justification by Faith. Three weeks later he preached in Oxford Castle; a malefactor with whom and for whom he prayed got up from his knees and cried, 'I am now ready to die. I know Christ has taken away my sins, and there is no more condemnation for me.'² On Tuesday, September 19, 1738, two days after his return from Germany, he 'went to the condemned felons in Newgate, and offered them free salvation'.³ He was back again in Newgate on Wednesday, November 8. His brother Charles was with him and they administered 'the last good office to the condemned malefactors'. Of the visit he wrote that he had witnessed 'the most glorious instance . . . of faith triumphing over sin and death' he had ever seen in his life.⁴ Several times during that month he preached to the prisoners in Oxford Castle. At Bristol in the spring of 1739 he began to minister to souls in prison. Preaching to them on Thursday, April 25, he 'was insensibly led without any previous design, to declare strongly and explicitly that "God willeth all men to be saved"'. Immediately one, and another, and another sunk to the earth: they dropped on every side as thunderstruck.' Similar scenes were witnessed the next day. 'All Newgate', he records with gladness, 'rang with the cries of those whom the word of God cut to the heart; two of whom were in a moment filled with joy, to the astonishment of those that beheld them.'⁵ Writing on Sunday, May 13, he says: 'Every morning I read prayers and preached at Newgate.'⁶ Three days after he was

¹ *Journal*, September 21, 1730.

² *Ibid.*, March 27.

³ *Journal*.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

informed by the Sheriff that he would only be permitted to preach once a week in the prison. In July he was told to preach no more. His solicitude is shown at the beginning of 1740; he made a special journey from Bristol to London, itself no light task, to see a man who had been sentenced to death for highway robbery.¹ Two months later, again in Bristol, he was in daily attendance on a soldier condemned to die.² The Commanding Officer gave orders prior to the day of execution that 'neither Mr. Wesley nor any of his people should be admitted, for they were Atheists'. Calling at the prison in the afternoon of April 2, Wesley was informed that 'the poor wretches under sentence of death' earnestly desired to speak to him. Their wish was frustrated by the express order of Alderman Beecher.³ A few months later Wesley was refused permission to see a condemned man; the poor fellow had begged to see him, but the curate of the parish forbade. That same cleric, on April 1, 1741, prevented Wesley from seeing another malefactor. In London at the beginning of 1742 he was twice asked by a felon to visit him at Newgate, but on each occasion was officially banned. On Saturday, September 3, he went to visit a murderer and was surprised to find the doors open to him. 'I exhorted the sick malefactor to cry unto God with all his might. . . . It was not long before the rest of the felons flocked round, to whom I spoke strong words concerning the Friend of sinners, which they received with as great signs of amazement as if it had been a voice from heaven.' They marvelled at the tidings of Divine mercy in environs which all human mercy seemed to have forsaken; with astonishment they heard that 'God was not willing any of them should perish, but that all should come to repentance'.⁴ On Sunday, August 28, 1743, John Wesley was preaching in the Castle Gaol at Exeter, and 'half the grown persons in the city' had gathered for the service. 'It was an awful sight' to see so many people within the prison walls. The service over he went to see Mr. Vines, a clergyman under sentence of death, and spoke with him as he did with a wretched lad under the same doom; the boy broke into bitter crying as Wesley left.⁵

In 1753 he is still visiting prisons. At Bristol on Monday, September 10, 1753, he 'preached to the condemned malefactors in Newgate; but I could make little impression on them'. It

¹ *Journal*, January 31, 1740.

² *Ibid.*, March 29, 1740.

³ *Journal*.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

was different in September, 1761. Preaching to the malefactors, he was asked to go on and give them another discourse. One young man, Patrick Ward, aged twenty, desired the Sacrament, which Wesley administered. Approaching the scaffold, Patrick had 'a peace and joy beyond all utterance'.¹ At the same gaol in September, 1775, in response to an urgent request from a felon doomed to die, Wesley preached to a crowded audience and the man was profoundly moved. Passing from deep agony to sure peace of mind, the malefactor professed a readiness to die.² At the gaol in Whiteley, Yorkshire, Wesley preached to the prisoners at six o'clock in the morning of Wednesday, April 28, 1779. The ground was covered with snow, but so many people attended that the service was held in the prison court.³

In his ministrations in prisons and among prisoners, John Wesley received noble support from Charles, his brother. Charles's conversion preceded his brother's by a few days and immediately Charles began to tell others about the joy of salvation. Constrained to make known the glad tidings of God's grace to those in deepest need, he did not hesitate for a moment to go to the social outcasts in the dreaded Newgate. In his *Journal* on July 10, 1738, Charles records the fact that at the request of Mr. Sparks, one of the visiting ministers, he went with Messrs. Bray and Burnham to Newgate Gaol and 'preached to ten malefactors who were under sentence of death'. 'He did so with a heavy heart', mainly because of his old prejudice against a death-bed repentance. But he overcame the difficulty and 'promised them all pardon, in the name of Jesus Christ, if they would at the last hour repent and believe the Gospel'.⁴ For nine days he went to preach to the malefactors and pray with them. On Wednesday, June 12, 'I preached at Newgate to the condemned felons, and visited one of them in his cell, sick of a fever; a poor black that had robbed his master. I told him of One who came down from heaven to save lost sinners, and him in particular.' The next day he administered the Holy Sacrament to five prisoners. On the Friday, after receiving the Sacrament himself from the Ordinary, he 'spoke strongly to the poor malefactors; and to the sick Negro in the condemned hole', being visibly 'moved by his sorrow and earnest desire of Christ'. Preaching again to the prisoners on the Saturday, 'I . . . rejoiced with my poor happy Black; who now *believes* the

¹ *Journal*, Wednesday, September 21, 1761.

³ *Journal*.

² *Journal*, September 21, 1775.

⁴ *C. Wesley's Journal*.

Son of God loved him, and gave himself for him'. Unable to go to Newgate on the Sunday on account of illness, he left his sick-bed on the Monday to preach once more to the condemned almost on the eve of the death 'which they must suffer the day after to-morrow'. After the service, he went with 'two more of the malefactors' to the cell of the poor Negro. 'The Black was quite happy.' On the morning of Tuesday, July 18, he administered the Sacrament to the Negro and eight others. 'At night', he says, 'I was locked in with Bray in one of the cells. We wrestled in mighty prayer. The soldier, in particular, found his comfort and joy increase every moment. Another from the time he communicated has been in perfect peace. Joy was visible in all their faces. We sang "Behold the Saviour of Mankind: Nail'd to the shameful tree. How vast the love that him inclined, To bleed and die for thee." It was one of the most triumphant hours I have ever known.' Anxious still to spend as much time as possible with the malefactors, he was at the prison by six o'clock in the morning of their execution, Wednesday, July 19. He went with a very heavy heart; the ten malefactors partook of the Sacrament and Charles Wesley prayed with them. At 9.30 their chains were taken off and an hour later the solemn procession to the place of execution began. 'They were all cheerful, full of comfort, peace and triumph assuredly persuaded that Christ had died for them and waited to receive them into paradise; Greenway was impatient to be with Christ.' The Negro gave Wesley a smile as he awaited the end; 'Read caught hold of my hand in a transport of joy; Newington seemed perfectly pleased; Hudson declared he was never better, or more at ease in mind and body. None showed any natural terror of death; no fear, or crying, or tears; . . . I never saw such calm triumph, such incredible indifference to dying.' Their favourite hymn, 'Behold the Saviour of Mankind', was sung. Kissing Newington and Hudson, Charles Wesley 'took leave of each in particular' and then spoke 'a few suitable words to the crowd'. 'I could do nothing but rejoice', and returned home, 'full of peace and confidence in our friends' happiness. That hour under the gallows was the most blessed hour of my life.'¹

That ministry of Charles Wesley and his friends to spirits in prison during those nine days dark and ominous with deepening shadows merits the highest praise. Into the shades of death

¹ *C. Wesley's Journal*, July 12-19, 1738.

they took light and song at personal risk of fever, but what we now admire and appreciate in their conduct was then subject to criticism, rebukes, and ridicule. Charles went to Llandressant in South Wales on Saturday, September 12, 1741, to visit some malefactors, only to find that they were being hurried to their doom to escape his ministrations. He did succeed in snatching time to sing a hymn and speak a few words before the execution actually took place.¹ On Friday, January 14, 1743, at Newgate, he was not permitted to enter the cells, but was locked in the yard by the turnkey to thwart him from doing so. 'I stood upon a bench and they climbed up to the windows of their cells; so that all could hear my exhortation and prayer.'² Next day he was thrust away again by a man, Townsend; aided by another keeper and in possession of a permit from the Sheriff, he gained admission at last and preached to the prisoners through the gates of the courtyard.

'When I was in prison ye visited Me.' The example of the two Wesleys influenced and inspired several of their disciples. On Friday, September 3, 1742, the *Daily Post* reported the execution of William Rosse and Thomas Smith at Ripley on the previous day. On the way to the scaffold the condemned were 'closely followed by the Rev. Mr. Howard . . . and Mr. Simms, formerly a Butcher, but lately a strict follower of the Modern Methodists'. The statement was made that the 'hardened Wretches were brought to Penitence' by the words of the Methodists.

Sarah Peters, a London Methodist, ministered to the felons at Newgate and sacrificed her life for them. John Wesley relates that she went with a friend on Sunday, October 9, 1748, to visit malefactors; John Lancaster, one of the condemned, had requested the Methodists to visit him; he invited the two of them into his cell. 'Although some dissuaded them from it, because the gaol distemper (a kind of pestilential fever) raged much among the prisoners', they disregarded the warning. Other prisoners gathered round, and Sarah Peters and her friend sang a hymn, read the Scripture, and prayed. 'From this time her labours were unwearied among them, praying with them, and for them, night and day.' She tried hard to get a pardon for one of the condemned; she visited Westminster, Kensington, and other places to get a petition prepared. Her efforts were in vain, but she visited the prison daily until the time of execution. John

¹ *C. Wesley's Journal.*

² *Ibid.*

Lancaster died the criminal's death, but there was peace in his heart. Thomas Atkins, a lad of nineteen, Thomas Thompson and John Roberts passed through the last portals. William Gardiner, confined to his cell with the dreaded gaol fever, was visited by Sarah, and through her ministry he found salvation. Samuel Chapman also had the gaol fever, but he, too, was visited in his cell. Sarah Cunningham fell into madness when the warrant for her death arrived. On the eve of the execution, Sarah Peters went to the prison with the intention of spending the night in prayer with the condemned, but she was not admitted. She persisted and at six o'clock in the fateful morning saw six of the prisoners. 'O what a happy night we have had' was their marvellous greeting. At the place of execution, John Lancaster gave out several hymns and sang the fifty-first Psalm, beginning with the words, 'Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving-kindness'. In serenity they went to their death. Within five days Sarah Peters was laid low with the gaol fever. She died as the result of her ministry of mercy; she was one of Newgate's martyrs; she was a true daughter of the Cross.¹

Silas Told, another London Methodist, responding to the call of John Wesley to visit those in prison, accompanied Sarah Peters on several occasions. On a day when eight were put to death he claimed that through the influence of the Methodists at Newgate they all 'appeared like giants refreshed with new wine'. He went with them to the scaffold and bore testimony at first hand to their peace and tranquillity.² For Silas Told it was the beginning of a long ministry in Newgate and other gaols. He visited nearly every prison and workhouse in and around London and preached in them and laboured in many gaols within a radius of twelve miles. He accompanied Mary Edmonton to the scaffold and stood beside her till the last. He attended Anderson, the man executed for robbing two women of sixpence on the highway in order to support a starving wife. Anderson, thanks to Silas Told, exclaimed on the morning of execution, 'This is the happiest day I ever saw in my life! Oh! who can express the joy and peace I now feel? If I could have all the world, I would not wish to live another day.'³ For over twenty-one years Silas Told devoted himself to prisons and prisoners. He was buried on Sunday, December 20, 1778, and John Wesley wrote: 'For many years he attended the malefactors

¹ *Journal*, November 13, 1748. *Arminian Magazine*, 1782, pp. 130-5.

² *Arminian Magazine*, 1788, pp. 67-8.

³ *Ibid.*, 1788, p. 349.

in Newgate, without fee or reward; and I suppose no man for this hundred years has been so successful in that melancholy office. God had given him peculiar talents for it; and he had amazing success therein. The greatest part of those whom he attended died in peace, and many of them in the triumph of faith.¹ Silas Told's compassionate offices have been immortalized by Hogarth who, half in jest, half in earnest, depicted him driving to the gallows by the side of one condemned to a malefactor's death.²

Other Methodists in various places and at various times took the message of Divine mercy into prison cells and in this lovely sense they were numbered with the transgressors. Charles Skelton, a Methodist from Bristol, in a letter of April 8, 1749, informed John Wesley that he had been led on a visit to London to minister to six felons on their way to the place of execution. He joined the sombre procession on its way to Tyburn. Climbing into one of the carts, he stood up and prayed. Many of the people took off their hats while he prayed, and the place echoed with loud amens when he concluded.³

The *Norwich Mercury* was sharply critical of the activities of Methodists in the city, but it made known the fact that on the last Wednesday in August, 1751, the Methodist preacher, after conducting several services on Castle Hill, 'preached a Sermon in the Castle Yard to the Prisoners, and afterwards distributed Books amongst them'.⁴

In April, 1752, the *Gentleman's Magazine*, also hostile to Methodists, gave a report of their labours among prisoners at Bristol. Three malefactors, Mooney, Jones, and Cudmore, were actually at the gallows when Mooney, who had been under Methodist influence, addressed the multitude to declare that Christ had saved him from hell: 'My chains are as ornaments and I am quite happy.' As the irons were unshackled he cried, 'Death has no sting for me,' and after they had been removed, 'I am got rid of the chain of sin. . . . Welcome halter, I am saved as the thief on the cross. Welcome gallows', were among the last words he spoke. On the following Sunday, 'most of the Methodists in Bristol attended his corps to the grave . . . in *Temple Churchyard*. . . . They would have sung an Hymn after their manner, but were forbid by the Mayor's Officers.' After he was

¹ *Journal*.

² Whiteley, *Wesley's England*, p. 217.

³ *Arminian Magazine*, 1779, pp. 93-5.

⁴ *Norwich Mercury*, August 31-September 7, 1751.

buried, six persons watched by the grave in order to prevent his body being taken away by the Surgeon. 'On Wednesday night some Methodists watch'd and sung from 11 till 4 the next morning.'¹

Ministering to malefactors in prison apparently received the endorsement of the Connexion. At the Conference in 1778 the question was asked: 'Is it not advisable for us to visit all the jails we can?' 'By all means', was the unanimous answer. 'There cannot be a greater charity.'² Alexander Mather at Nottingham one night in the year 1780 went to see a felon on the eve of execution. The man was described as unrepentant and terrifying, addicted to cursing and swearing, but the Methodist preacher prayed with him. Next day, on the journey to the scaffold, the condemned insisted on walking between Mr. Mather and another Methodist. Just prior to the execution, the man 'rejoiced with joy unspeakable' and they sang the hymn, 'O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise'.³

On April 4, 1785, John Wynn was executed at Bedford for stealing. The evidence showed that he had been persuaded by his mother to commit the offence. Joseph Pescod and other Methodists regularly visited him in the local gaol. A respite of nine days was granted him and he evinced keen disappointment. He declared emphatically that he would rather die than be sent to Africa. Several Methodists who had been ministering to him decided to spend the whole of the last night with him in his cell, to watch and pray with him. At six o'clock in the morning, Joseph Pescod visited him. They partook of the Sacrament and sang, prayed and conversed for at least two hours. Reaching the place of death, Pescod asked how he felt. 'I feel myself happy', he replied. 'I have no fear of death.' In the evening of that day, his funeral sermon was preached at the local Methodist Chapel.⁴

Three malefactors were executed at Reading on March 25, 1785. Their last moments were comforted by the ministrations of the Methodists. One of the criminals had been in gaol several months; encouraged by the Methodist visitors, he had read the Bible through at least three times. So zealous was he in reading the Scriptures that he memorized the whole of the Epistle to the

¹ April 24, 1752, p. 236. ² Myles, *Chronological History of the Methodists*, p. 142.

³ *Arminian Magazine*, 1780, p. 153. *Lives of Early Meth. Preachers*, vol. 1, p. 269.

⁴ *Arminian Magazine*, 1788, pp. 70-1, 125.

Hebrews. Converted in prison, he sought to persuade his fellows to accept the gift of Divine mercy; from time to time he prayed with them. When the Sheriff came to take him to the scaffold, he sang praises unto God. He continued singing as he journeyed to the place of execution. In front of the gallows, a strange, sad pulpit, he exhorted the spectators for fully twenty-five minutes, pleading with them to accept the gospel of salvation. One Richard Hemmings, also about to die the shameful death, claimed that he had never been so happy in all his life. They sang together in their last moments on earth Charles Wesley's hymn, 'Jesu, Lover of my soul, let me to Thy bosom fly'. They testified to their readiness to die and the darkness was as light round about them.¹

In the last decade of the century instances were reported from several sources of Methodist visitations and ministrations to those in prison. On May 7, 1790, John Valton, a Methodist preacher, recorded in his diary that at Bristol he had attended the unfortunate Macnamara, condemned to die on that day. 'After singing, praying and receiving the Sacrament with him in Newgate, I rode with two clergymen in a coach to the gallows. We then spent an hour with him in the cart.' More than twenty thousand spectators, it was said, watched the final scene.² Two months later he attended another execution in Bristol. Recording it on July 9, he wrote: 'This morning I spent above an hour in Newgate with poor Wm. Hungerford. . . . The time was most agreeably spent before and after Sacrament, singing, praying and suitable discourse was our employment.' With others, he accompanied the condemned in the cart; they sang hymns on the way. At the scaffold the man prayed three times, then addressed the curious and waiting crowd.³

Samuel Rhodes and Richard Crosby lay in prison under sentence of death; two Methodist preachers, John Hickling and Mr. Fennick, visited them regularly in the early days of March, 1794. On March 22, the day of execution, John Hickling went with them on their way to the gallows. Samuel Rhodes, a few minutes before his death, exclaimed, 'Death is nothing to us'; 'O how happy I am.' Richard Crosby cried out, 'I do not fear death.'⁴

Samuel Hendry, twenty-four years of age, and his brother

¹ *Arminian Magazine*, 1786, pp. 428-31.

² *Wesley Historical Society Proceedings*, vol. 8, p. 118.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁴ *Arminian Magazine*, 1795, p. 394.

John, a boy of thirteen summers, were executed at Thetford on April 2, 1796. Neither of them was able to read. They belonged to Horning in Norfolk and had been convicted of highway robbery. T. Broadbent, a Methodist preacher, frequently visited them in gaol, and they experienced conversion. On the day of execution a number of Methodists accompanied them to the gallows. 'Calm, resigned and happy', the brothers said they were in the last dread moments. 'We have no fear of death', they loudly declared; 'we are assured of our pardon thro' Christ Jesus'. Mr. Broadbent had prayed with them as the cart rumbled on with its human freight, Samuel crying out, 'This is the happiest ride I ever had'. Speaking to the crowd after the preacher had given out a hymn, he said, 'My friends, do not grieve for us. God has pardoned our sins, and we are going to heaven.'¹ A glory shone round the gallows.

Two years later at the same place John Nebbs was put to death for forgery. He had been visited by William Temperley, a Methodist preacher, and a sense of the Divine mercy filled his soul. On the day of death he was perfectly calm. 'I do not fear death', he publicly declared. 'I am happy in God. I long to be gone from this world. . . . I have peace within.'² Such scenes in eighteenth-century England recalled the brave and joyous disdain with which in Rome the early Christians faced what man could do unto them.

The religion that John Wesley and his followers gave to the common people of this land was not only a channel for Divine mercy, but also for human kindness, the parable of the Good Samaritan in living action. Religion with Divine mercy and human-kindness in it was something rather startling in surprise of beauty among the distressed poor and the toiling masses of the eighteenth century. For the crushed and despised classes to be told over and over again that God loved them, that Christ died for them, that there was forgiveness for sins through the wondrous Cross, sounded strange in their ears and brought a marvel to their hearts. In addition, acts of tender pity and loving concern done unto them and for them must have filled them with astonishment, while bearing witness to the truth and sincerity of the gospel.

John Wesley's campaign of open-air preaching took the message of God's mercy to the poorest of the poor, and the common people heard him gladly. His visits to the most wretched

¹ *Arminian Magazine*, 1796, p. 497.

² *Ibid.*, 1799, pp. 14-16.

of the criminals to tell them that God loved them with an everlasting love proved the depth and strength of his faith and dedication. Pure and undefiled religion to him was not only to worship God 'with the fruit of the lips, but also to show forth that love in visiting the sick, helping the poor, caring for the needy. His was an applied and not a theoretical Christianity. To serve the present age, he felt, was a duty incumbent upon him and all Methodists. Social service was an indispensable part of the Christian religion. From the hour when he felt his heart strangely warmed within him it was so. After preaching at Hannam on Monday, January 21, 1740, he made a collection in the evening at Bristol 'for the relief of the poor without Lawford's gate'. These people, he says, 'having no work (because of the severe frost) and no assistance from the parish wherein they live, were reduced to the last extremity'. Collections for them were taken on the Thursday and on the Sunday; as a result, he was able 'to feed a hundred, sometimes a hundred and fifty a day' of those who were most in need.¹ Writing in his diary on Monday, November 3, 1740, concerning his endeavour to assist the poor in London, he says: 'We distributed, as every one had need, among the numerous poor of our Society, the clothes of several kinds, which many, who could spare them, had brought for that purpose.' In the course of the same month several proposals were made to him 'for employing those who were out of business'. 'We determined to make a trial of one which several of our brethren recommended to us. Our aim was, with as little expense as possible, to keep them at once from want and idleness; in order to which we took twelve of the poorest, and a teacher, into the Society room, where they were employed for four months till Spring came on, in carding and spinning of cotton; and the design answered: they were employed and maintained with very little more than the produce of their own labour.'² The *Weekly Miscellany* severely criticized him; it wanted to know 'what he means by setting up so many Spinning Wheels at the Foundery. Everybody allows that there are above twenty, and some say forty. The common complaint is that all this is done with an ill Design.' Young servants, it contended, neglected their masters' businesses and in consequence were turned away, only to be received at the Foundery with others of their kind. John Wesley could only be furthering the system for self-interest with a view to making money.³

¹ *Journal*.² *Journal*, November 25.³ April 25, 1741.

Before the end of that winter, Wesley was seeking to succour the sick at Kingswood. A widow, having just lost her husband was ill, and her six children were ill as well. They were 'without either physic, money, food, or any visible means of procuring it'.¹ Six weeks later Wesley was back again in London; on May 7 'I reminded the United Society that many of our brethren and sisters had not needful food; many were out of business, and that without their own fault; and many sick and ready to perish'. Believing that he himself had not done all in his power 'to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to employ the poor, and to visit the sick', he tried to persuade his fellow Methodists 'to bring what clothes each could spare, to be distributed among those who wanted most. To give weekly a penny, or what they could afford, for the relief of the poor and sick'.² He told them that his design was 'to employ for the present all the women who are out of business, and desire it, in knitting'. Twelve persons were appointed 'to inspect these, and to visit and provide things needful for the sick'. Each of them was 'to visit all the sick within their district, every other day; and to meet on Tuesday evening, to give an account of what they had done and consult what can be done further'.³ The members of the London Society decided to contribute their pennies every week for the relief of the poor. Stewards were appointed to receive and distribute the contributions. They were instructed not to give 'either an ill word or an ill look' to them that desired relief. 'Do not hurt them', commanded Wesley, 'if you cannot help.' Every week they were to meet together to arrange for 'relief to the sick, as everyone had need, and to give the remainder of what had been contributed each week to those who appeared to be in the most pressing want'.⁴ Because of demands on their time, it was very difficult for the stewards to keep in touch with the sick. 'Some were ready to perish before they knew of their illness; and when they did know, it was not in their power . . . to visit them as often as they desired.' John Wesley, perceiving the difficulty, asked for volunteers to do the work of sick-visiting. Choosing forty-six out of the number who offered their services, he told them to call on the sick at least three times a week 'to enquire into the state of their souls, and to advise them as occasion may require; to enquire into their disorders and procure advice for them; to relieve them, if they

¹ *Journal*, March 23, 1741.

³ *Ibid.*

² *Journal*.

⁴ *Works*, vol. 8, p. 262.

are in want; to do anything for them, which he (or she) can do'.¹ As a result of these arrangements, 'Wesley claimed that 'many lives have been saved, many sicknesses healed, much pain and want prevented or removed, many hearts have been made glad, many mourners comforted'.²

In the early part of 1744 John Wesley was once more in London. Knowing the amount of distress still prevalent, he strongly advised the members of his Society to give 'their bread to the hungry' and 'to clothe the naked'. In a very short time a sum of £50 was subscribed and immediately spent 'in linen, woollen and shoes' for those who were diligent 'and yet in want'.³ Sojourning in the city longer than he had intended, he confessed that he was glad he had done so because he had been able to procure 'more raiment for the poor' before he left. He had made another appeal, which had brought in £30.⁴ Before the end of March he had received another £170, by means of which 'three hundred and thirty poor had been provided with needful clothing'. Others were still in dire need, and he made a third collection and got an additional sum of £26.⁵

Two years later Wesley again expressed his continuing and constant concern for the poor, for whom regular weekly subscriptions were being made. But there were those who 'had no food to sustain nature; some were destitute of even necessary clothing; some had not where to lay their head'. Compared with their distresses he observed 'that the little contributions made weekly did in no wise suffice to remove their wants, being hardly sufficient to relieve the sick, and even that in a scanty manner'. Fearful lest some of the sufferers might pine away and die if not assisted instantly and urgently, he suggested to his followers the expediency of giving up the habit of tea-drinking so as to save money with which to feed and clothe those in desperate need and perhaps save life itself. 'What then might be done', he argues, 'if ten thousand, or one thousand, or only five hundred, would do it? Yes, if half the number should say, "I will compute this day what I have expended in tea, weekly or yearly, I will immediately enter on cheaper food: And whatever is saved hereby, I will put into that poor-box weekly, to feed the hungry and to clothe the naked." I am mistaken if any among us need want either food or raiment from that hour'.⁶ He discussed the proposal with the leaders of

¹ *Works*, vol. 8, p. 263.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Journal*, January 17.

⁴ *Ibid.*, February 27.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Works*, vol. 11, p. 500.

the Society, who agreed that the 'great expense . . . of wealth . . . of time and of money' might be prevented 'if the poorer people of our Society could be persuaded to leave off drinking tea'. Wesley himself and a few others set the example.¹ With the money saved in this way by one single person, 'about thirty poor people . . . were restored to health; . . . a thousand more good effects' would accrue if others followed suit.²

Another charitable enterprise was undertaken by Wesley in 1746. Noticing that many small business people needed 'a present supply of money to carry on their business, and not willing to make use of the pawnbroker in order to provide themselves with cash, I resolved', he says, 'to try if we could not find a remedy for this also. I went, in a few days, from one end of the town to the other and exhorted those who had this world's goods to assist their needy brethren. Fifty pounds were contributed. This was immediately lodged in the hands of two stewards; who attended every Tuesday morning, in order to lend to those who wanted any small sum, not exceeding twenty shillings, to be repaid within three months.' In less than twelve months two hundred and fifty people were assisted. Appealing for funds, Wesley pleaded: 'Join hands with God, to make a poor man live.'³ In due time the fund was considerably augmented by means of public collections and private donations, and the amount of the loan was advanced to £5. A striking example of the success of the scheme came from the experience of James Lackington. Destitute of money, he applied for a loan. With the £5 he commenced a book-shop; before many years had passed by he was making a profit of over £4,000 a year.⁴

The Foundery in London continued to be the centre and hive of charitable activities. For long time Wesley had been concerned about the condition of the poor children in the vicinity. Finding no other means available to him, he opened his house, so 'that they might have an opportunity of learning to read, write and cast accounts'. Some difficulty was encountered at first in the inability to get the right kind of teachers, 'men of honesty and of sufficient knowledge, who had talents for, and their hearts in the work'. At one period sixty children came to the school. Most of the parents were unable to contribute anything and the expense of lodging and

¹ *Journal*, July 6, 1746.

² *Works*, vol. 11, p. 507.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. 8, p. 267. *Journal*, July 17, 1746; also January 17, 1748.

⁴ *James Lackington's Confessions*.

training had to be met from voluntary gifts. Clothing was provided for many of the children.¹

(The history of these things might have saved the novelist, Marjorie Bowen, from her outburst to the effect that 'there was not a child who came into contact with eighteenth-century Methodism who must not have been the worse for it. A terrible heritage had Mrs. Susannah Wesley left behind her; her ideas of education were welded in the hands of her son into an evil thing that did unrecorded harm to thousands of children.')

In addition to the school, Wesley had 'a poor-house' at the Foundery. For the purpose, he leased two houses that widows and the fatherless in particular might have board and lodging. They were 'provided . . . with things needful for the body; toward the expense of which', Wesley said, 'I set aside first the weekly subscriptions of the bands, and then all that was collected at the Lord's Supper'. At one period there were 'nine widows, one blind woman, two poor children, two upper servants, a maid and a man'. 'I might add', he concluded, 'four or five preachers; for I myself, as well as the other preachers who are in town, diet with the poor, on the same food and at the same table.'³

Before the close of 1746 Wesley tried another experiment in social service. Not satisfied with feeding and clothing the poor, he thought it would be better still to heal their bodies. His intention to provide medicaments for the purpose was made known to the Society in London on December 4, 1746. About thirty people came next day to the Foundery to receive attention; in less than three months the number had risen to five hundred. As a result, many sick people were restored to health again. The help of an apothecary and of an experienced surgeon was secured, and Wesley's patients increased to six hundred.⁴ Still unsatisfied, he published a book on *Primitive Physic* to make known to a wider constituency his simple remedies for certain curable diseases. As late as 1772 the book was still in use and many of the suggestions in it were highly recommended by one of the London newspapers.⁵

Wesley's own tenderness and pity and courtesy came out in his advice to the stewards on June 4, 1747. In order to guard against grieving the poor, he exhorts them to 'give them soft words if nothing else. Abstain from either sour looks or harsh

¹ *Works*, vol. 8, p. 266.

² *Wrestling Jacob*, p. 317.

³ *Works*, vol. 8, p. 265. G. J. Stevenson, *City Road Chapel*, p. 41.

⁴ *Journal*, December 4, 1746. *Works*, vol. 8, p. 264.

⁵ *Westminster Journal*, February 8, 1772.

words. Let them be glad to come, even though they should go empty away. Put yourself in the place of every poor man, and deal with him as you would God should deal with you.'¹

On Friday, November 2, 1750, he wrote in his diary: 'I began taking an account of all in the Society that were in want; but I was soon discouraged, their number so increasing upon me, particularly about Moorfields, that I saw no possibility of relieving them.'² In a letter to Ebenezer Blackwell on February 4, 1751, he related how he spent a gift of five guineas, 'To Eliz. Brooks, expecting daily to have her goods seized for rent', £1 1s.; 'To Eliz. Room (a poor widow) for rent', 5s.; 'Toward clothing Mary Middleton and another poor woman almost naked', 10s.; 'To John Edger, a poor weaver, out of work', 5s.; 'To Lucy Jones, a poor orphan', 2s.; 'To a poor family, for food and fuel', 5s.; 'To Christopher Brown, out of business', 2s. 6d.; 'To an ancient woman, in great distress', 2s. 6d.; 'Distributed among several sick families', 10s.³

On Thursday, February 8, 1753, John Wesley was again busy among the sick poor of London. 'But such scenes who could see unmoved. There are none such to be found in a Pagan country.' On his visits he 'found some in their cells under ground; others in their garrets, half starved both with cold and hunger, added to weakness and pain. But I found not one of them unemployed, who was able to crawl about the room.'⁴ A fortnight later he was visiting once more. Some of the sick upon whom he called were without fire, 'bitterly cold as it was', and he doubted whether they had any food.⁵

Taking a meal with some friends at Leigh in Lancashire on Monday, October 11, 1756, 'a poor woman came to the door with two little children; they seemed to be half starved, as well as their mother, who was also shivering with an ague. She was extremely thankful for a little food, and still more so for a few pills, which seldom fail to cure that disorder.'⁶

Wesley's concern to give healing was illustrated further by the use of an electrical machine for the cure of certain ailments. On November 9, 1756, he wrote: 'Having procured an apparatus on purpose, I ordered several persons to be electrified, who were ill of various disorders: some of them found an immediate, some a gradual cure. From this time I appointed first some hours in every week, and afterward an hour in every day,

¹ *Journal*, June 4, 1747.

⁴ *Journal*.

² *Journal*.

⁵ *Ibid*.

³ *Works*, vol. 12, p. 158.

⁶ *Ibid*.

wherein any that desired it, might try the virtue of this surprising medicine. Two or three years after, our patients were so numerous that we were obliged to divide them; so part were electrified in Southwark, part at the Foundry, others near St. Paul's, and the rest near the Seven Dials. The same method we have taken ever since; and, to this day, while hundreds, perhaps thousands, have received unspeakable good, I have not known one man, woman, or child, who has received any hurt thereby.¹ According to the *Westminster Journal*, Wesley in 1772 was still using an electrical machine. 'We are assured that Mr. Wesley has procured an Electrical Machine at the Foundry, near Moorfields, where any person may be electrified gratis, from nine to twelve every day, except Saturdays and Sundays. . . . Mr. Wesley says, Electrifying in a proper manner cures St. Anthony's Fire, Gouts, Headache, Inflammations, Lameness, Palpitations of the Heart, Palsy, Rheumations, Sprain, Wan, Toothache, sore Throat, and Swellings of all Sorts.'²

On January 7, 1759, John Wesley paid another visit to Bristol and told the Methodists there that he had come in order 'to provide for the poor'. He preached a sermon in their behalf and afterwards announced that the collection 'was a great deal more than double what it used to be'.³ Four years later he is still engaged in charitable and compassionate activities. On February 1, 1763, a London correspondent informed the readers of the *Leeds Intelligencer* that on the previous Saturday 'a great number of poor persons had pease, pottage and barley broth given them at the Foundry, Moorfields, at the expense of the Rev. Mr. Wesley; and on Sunday there was a collection for further supplying the necessities of the Poor, when upwards of 100£ was collected'. In the early part of March, 1765, the condition of the unemployed weavers in London caused him anxiety. On March 10, 'I made a collection in our congregation for the poor weavers who are out of employment. It amounted to about forty pounds. In the evening our own Society met and contributed fourteen pounds more, to relieve a few of their own distressed members.'⁴ Twelve months later a legacy of £1,000 was left to him by Miss Leven, and in less than one year 'it had all been given away to the poor'.⁵

The year 1772 was marked by 'exceptional suffering among the labouring classes and the poor', and John Wesley was

¹ *Journal*.

² March 1-7, 1772.

³ *Journal*.

⁴ *Ibid*.

⁵ J. S. Simon, *Master Builder*, p. 206.

extremely active in ministering to the distressed and afflicted. Finding a new sphere of usefulness among the workhouses in London, 'he prevailed upon the authorities over the parishes of St. Luke's, Finsbury, Clerkenwell, Shoreditch, St. George's, in the East, and many others, to open the workhouses' to those Methodists who were willing to visit them 'every Lord's Day, to read and expound the Scriptures, and in other ways to try and improve and elevate moral and social conditions of the poor inmates'. That was the beginning of the Christian Community which continued the work for over a hundred and fifty years.¹

Multitudes of people were out of employment in Norwich, Colchester, London, and other places. John Wesley wrote a challenging statement to the public newspapers: 'Why are thousands of people starving, perishing for want, in every part of England?' The answer was that they could not find work. Describing the terrible conditions in which he himself has seen the poor families suffering, he recommended what he believed to be a sure and certain remedy—namely, 'sinking the price of provisions'. It could be done if distilling were prohibited and the supply of horses reduced. He also advised an increase in the number of cattle to be reared, and a restriction in the size of farms.²

At Bristol on Friday, September 26, 1783, he observed the poverty of many among the Methodist people. He was moved to speak about it to some of the more fortunate and collected £40: Off he went to those 'who were in the most pressing want : . . visited them at their own houses, and was able to provide them with temporary relief'.³ In London at the beginning of 1785 he noted the fact that at that time of the year they 'usually distribute coals and bread among the poor of the Society'. He considered that 'they wanted clothes as well as food'. He 'walked through the town, and begged two hundred pounds, in order to clothe them that wanted it most; but it was hard work, as most of the streets were filled with melting snow, which often lay ankle deep, so that my feet were steeped in snow-water nearly from morning till evening'. Persevering for several days in his errands of mercy, despite the severity of the weather, he was attacked 'with a violent

¹ G. J. Stevenson, *History of the Christian Community*, p. 2.

² *Lloyd's Evening Post*, December 21, 1772. *London Chronicle*, December 17-19, 1772. *Leeds Mercury*, December 29, 1772. Tyerman, *Life of Wesley*, vol. 3, pp. 130-4.

³ *Journal*.

flux' and had to call in the aid of Dr. Whitehead.¹ Two years later he was begging once more. He spent Monday, January 8, 1787, and the next four days 'begging for the poor. I hoped to be able to provide food and raiment for those of the Society who were in pressing want, yet had no weekly allowance; these were about two hundred; but I was much disappointed', though 'six or seven indeed of our brethren gave ten pounds a-piece. If forty or fifty had done this, I could have carried my design into execution. However, much good was done with two hundred pounds, and many sorrowful hearts made glad.'²

Wesley's charitable concern was not fitful; it was part of his Christian character and mission and characterized his whole life. What he had said six years earlier was still true: 'No foot of land do I possess. No cottage in the wilderness.' His affection for the poor was expressed in his last will and testament; he requested that six poor persons should carry his body to the grave. Many were the eulogies published; perhaps none was more appropriate than that printed in the *Monthly Review* and quoted by the *Leeds Intelligencer*:³ 'Mr. Wesley's real worth is demonstrated by nothing more convincingly than by his dying . . . worth nothing. It proves that the influence which he acquired and long preserved over a numerous sect was not employed to any sordid purpose. The poverty of such a man enriches his fame.'

It is not possible to calculate how much money John Wesley gave away during his lifetime, but the major part of his income went to the poor. According to Samuel Bradburn, 'he never gave away out of his own pocket less than £1,000 a year'. The last entry in Wesley's account-book said: 'I save all I can, and give all I can, that is, all I have.'⁴ When he 'had thirty pounds a year, he lived on twenty-eight and gave away forty shillings. The next year receiving sixty pounds, he still lived on twenty-eight and gave away thirty-two. The third year he received ninety pounds, and gave away sixty-two. The fourth year he received a hundred and twenty pounds; still he lived on twenty-eight, and gave to the poor all the rest.'⁵

John Wesley's noble example influenced numbers of his followers. During the years 1770-89 'the London Methodists gave away to the poor some £15,000'.⁶ For at least forty years

¹ *Journal*, January 4, 1785.

² *Journal*.

³ August 16, 1791.

⁴ G. J. Stevenson, *City Road Chapel*, p. 107.

⁵ *Works*, vol. 7, p. 34. Quoted by Tyerman, *Life of John Wesley*. vol. 1, pp. 71-2.

⁶ E. D. Bebb, *Nonconformity and Social and Economic Life*, p. 143.

the pennies collected at the weekly bands and classes were given to the poor.

Other Societies joined in the ameliorative work. Tetney in Lincolnshire was a case in point. Visiting the Society there on Tuesday, February 24, 1747, Wesley was joyful: 'I have not seen such another in England. In the class-paper (which gives an account of the contribution for the poor) I observed one gave eight-pence, often ten-pence a week; another thirteen, fifteen or eighteen pence; another sometimes one, sometimes two shillings.' The leader, asked to explain the cause of such generosity, replied, 'We do it gladly, whereby we are able from time to time to entertain all the strangers that come to Tetney, who have no food to eat, nor any friend to give them lodging.'¹

Poor and friendless strangers were more substantially assisted in later years, when several benevolent societies were established for that purpose. John Wesley in 1784 refers to an organization of this sort in London. 'A few poor men . . . agreed to pay each a penny a week in order to relieve strangers who had no habitation—no clothes—no food—no friends. They met once a week, and assigned to each his share of the work for the ensuing week; to discover proper objects (who, indeed, were easily found); and to relieve them according to their several necessities.'²

A similar organization was created at Bristol in September, 1786. John Wesley met the members of this organization, the Strangers' Friend Society, on Sunday, March 14, 1790; he confessed afterwards that he had never heard or read of such an institution till within a few years ago. 'So this also', he noted with an emphasis of gladness, 'is one of the fruits of Methodism.'³

Commenting on the formation of the Manchester Strangers' Friend Society, the *Leeds Intelligencer* declares that 'a society of upwards of thirty men of respectability and character' had 'undertaken the arduous task of visiting in person the place where the poorest and most wretched outcasts of the community are to be found. Those who have no claim to relief from any parish are continuously experiencing the complicated miseries incident to the most forlorn state to which human nature can be reduced, that of living amongst opulence and comfort, the victims of disease, nakedness and want.' 'Sick strangers and such as have no helpers, are the peculiar object

¹ *Journal*.

² Myles, *Chronological History of the Methodists*, pp. 180-1.

³ *Journal*. Myles, *Chronological History of the Methodists*, p. 180.

of this society's care. Upwards of five hundred of these have been relieved since the commencement of the present year.'¹ In a later reference and comment, the claim was made that the 'truly humane charity, the Strangers' Friend Society' 'has been the means of relieving a great number of families, all objects of the deepest distress. In the course of twelve months (the time it has been instituted) upwards of £254 have been distributed by the visitors amongst the forlorn and destitute. An institution of this kind, formed to *seek out* distress and to *relieve* it; to succour the *stranger* who has no friend, no relative whose assistance can be implored, has certainly claim to the support of the benevolent, and we are glad to find this support has been liberally given. It is scarcely possible to suppose such wretchedness could be found as the visitors to the institution have brought to light.'² Thirty-four visitors were engaged in investigation and relief, the whole town being divided into sixteen districts.

According to another report, within three weeks of the formation of the Manchester Strangers' Friend Society an amount of over £300 had been subscribed; very soon the sum had been increased to £700. In one year 1,678 families were relieved and 4,271 visits made. Thousands of poor people were living in cellars and garrets in Manchester's slums, and Adam Clarke, the organizer of this new form of Christian charity in that town, regarded the work of the visitors as 'Important, Awful and Honourable'.³ He urged them to 'leave no corner of this large and very prosperous town unexplored. . . . Hunt Poverty,' he cried, 'Sin and Disease thro' all their public haunts and private retreats. . . . Strive to lessen, if you cannot remove, the immense load of human ills.'⁴ Speaking later of their work, he said that 'the most pious, sensible and zealous young men of the Methodist Society' were appointed as visitors. They 'were not afraid to look death in the face'. Nor did they hesitate 'to take the dangerous labour on themselves of visiting the wretches in cellars and garrets, where poverty and distress had taken up their abode, and where the most virulent contagion had dwelt for many years with increasing, because undisturbed malignity'. Two objects were constantly in mind: the 'salvation of the souls of the ignorant and profligate' and 'the preservation of their lives by supplying them with food and raiment. . . . Medical assistance for the cure of their diseases' was freely given. In

¹ February 20, 1792.

³ *Methodist Magazine*, 1798, p. 422.

² November 19, 1792.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 423.

twelve years not less than £6,403 had been expended on relief and over 60,000 persons assisted.¹

Describing 'the Nature, Design and General Rules of the Strangers' Friend Society, as established in Dublin, Manchester, Liverpool and other places', the *Methodist Magazine* argued that street-beggars were not the most necessitous people. 'Cellars, garrets, and such like places exhibit spectacles much more affecting'; 'multitudes of these have been discovered utterly destitute of friends, deprived of every means of procuring the necessities of life'. Not only had the discoveries been made, but 'food, clothes, coals and medical assistance' had been given them through the medium of the Strangers' Friend Society. 'Protestants, Roman Catholics, Strangers and Foreigners have an equal right to be relieved by it.'²

Writing to the inhabitants of Liverpool concerning the work of the Strangers' Friend Society which the Methodists had established there, Adam Clarke claimed that at least £98 5s. 6d. had been given in a year and 321 families assisted. Many of them 'were in the utmost distress, and in all human probability must have perished had it not been for the timely assistance they received from this society'. 'We wish to save life', he concluded, and appealed most earnestly for greater liberality.³

A Strangers' Friend Society was also established at Leeds. Reporting the formation of this charitable organization, the *Leeds Intelligencer* referred to the great distress 'to which many of the lower class . . . are constantly liable'. For the purpose 'of relieving the pressing wants of the real and modest poor' 'an Institution has been some time on foot at the Methodist Chapel'. 'Without any regard to religion, or even nation', relief is given to the necessitous poor. 'It is enough that the objects be really distressed to qualify them for a claim on this charitable institution.'⁴ By so good a design 'the friendless in distress are sought for in cellars, in garrets, and in hovels, where many a benevolent heart solicitous to find such objects, cannot but have success.' During the year 1795 at least five thousand visits were made and over £560 expended on relieving distress.⁵ At the Methodist Chapel in 1799 Dr. Coke, a prominent Methodist preacher, preached the annual sermon on behalf of 'the Benevolent or Strangers' Friend Society'. The public were

¹ *Report of Manchester Strangers' Friend Society*, 1802-1803, p. 29.

² *Methodist Magazine*, 1798, p. 419.

³ *Ibid.*, 1798, p. 426.

⁴ *Leeds Intelligencer*, April 1, 1793.

⁵ *Ibid.*, February 15, 1796.

informed 'that in the course of last Winter more than Seven Hundred Blankets and Coverlets were distributed amongst the necessitous'.¹

A report on the work done by the Strangers' Friend Society in Bath declared that in 'five years near 2000 . . . distressed objects have been relieved and visited'.² 'To the honour of the society of Methodists', said the *Leeds Intelligencer*, 'be it mentioned that for several years past they have been the chief instrument in supplying in York, as well as in Manchester, Bath and other places, a most charitable institution called *the Strangers' Friend Society*, for the relief of the widow, the fatherless, and the strangers of every religious denomination, to afford them succour.'³ The *York Courant* announced that the Strangers' Friend Society in York had already laid before the public 'the nature and design of that Institution, and also took the liberty of requesting the aid of those who might be desiring of promoting it'. By the expenditure of £114 18s. 8d. during 1796, 'many objects of misery and misfortune, where cases were pitiable and peculiarly distressing have been visited and relieved'; fourteen visitors had been regularly engaged in visiting 'the apartments of the wretched and necessitous of all descriptions'.⁴ The report of the following year explained that the whole income of £116 9s. 9d. had 'been expended in procuring food, fire, cloathes and other necessities for the distressed'.⁵ Once again the subscribers were reminded that the object of the institution 'is to visit the apartments of the wretched and necessitous of all descriptions, and administer to objects thus discovered such temporary relief as their cases may require. . . . As instruments in the hands of the supporters of this charity, we wish to save life', declared the committee, and 'as instruments in the hands of God, we wish to save souls.' Alexander Mather, a prominent Methodist preacher, was advertised to preach the annual sermon.⁶ The income for 1798 amounted to £114 16s. 3d., and all was spent 'in relieving distress and suffering'. 'The most abject misery', it was claimed, had found relief. Another Methodist preacher, Mr. Entwisle, was engaged to preach the charity sermon.⁷ An increase of nearly £10 was reported for the year 1799, and 'Real Misery without regard to Sect, Party, or any other private con-

¹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, December 23, 1799. *York Courant*, December 30, 1799.

² *Leeds Intelligencer*, February 15, 1796.

³ February 15, 1796.

⁴ *York Courant*, December 26, 1796.

⁵ *Ibid.*, January 1, 1798.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, December 24, 1798.

sideration' had been successfully relieved. Dr. Coke was engaged to preach the annual sermon.¹

Before the close of the century a Strangers' Friend Society was formed at Hull. 'Persons of unblameable character' were appointed as visitors to assist 'the poor in matters of domestic economy'. Tickets were given to the necessitous to enable them to get from the butcher, baker, and grocer 'such necessities as they think are most wanted'. Rule 22 required the visitors 'to recommend to the poor attendance on divine worship; industry, economy, cleanliness, white-washing the walls of their homes, and the admission of fresh air'.²

The Bradford Benevolent Society appeared to be on a smaller scale; but, like the other charity organizations, it was under Methodist management. In 1796 a sum of £15 1s. 7d. was contributed and given to the poor; by June, 1797, the amount had risen to £52. Many cases of distress were relieved and over 540 visits made.³

Methodism in the eighteenth century sought as far as in its power lay to bear a living witness to the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Doing so it builded better than it knew; it quickened the national conscience and made the beginnings of a comprehensive social service whose structure is not yet complete in England, great as the extension has been; perhaps it might be claimed that the Beveridge Report in our own day derives in some measure from the active and studious pity of John Wesley and his sense of a genius for organization. But the fact is clear that Methodists were not only interested, as some critics would have it, in preparing men and women for another world, but also were impassioned in their determination to alleviate their physical and economic distress in this. And of sorrow and sighing, of tribulation and disease, the common people in England in the eighteenth century had their full and tragic share.

¹ *York Courant*, December 23, 1799.

² *Report of the Hull Strangers' Friend Society*.

³ *Leeds Intelligencer*, June 12, 1797.

CHAPTER II

METHODISM GAVE OPPORTUNITY

THE Methodists, with their message of salvation and its emphasis upon the worth and dignity of the human soul in the sight of God, went into the highways and byways. They were the couriers of Divine mercy and of what, in a noble phrase, General Smuts has called 'the Samaritan spirit'. They were the heralds of the promises and opportunities and possibilities of a new life. They chose the lowest deeps and reaches of poverty, distress, and wretchedness—the prisons, for example—in which to proclaim their message; they took their torches, so to express it, into the very heart and precincts of the embittered darkness. It was a tremendous and most courageous crusade, this pilgrimage of grace, among the common people, who were treated as industrial slaves, left to starve and suffer in dirty cellars and damp dwelling-places, and, when infirmity came and old age approached (not old age as we know it now; mortality was earlier), despatched to miserable workhouses as though but dumb, driven cattle.

To these, of all people, the Methodists brought hope and human sunshine in addition to a celestial message; they brought a surprising and startling sense of the value of life. By means of preaching, systematic sick-visiting, and social ministries, constant concern for the individual as well as the lump, these religious enthusiasts made God's love real and vivid. In Tennyson's words, Truth entered in at lowly doors. The Methodists sang hymns of sacred rapture, taking a poetry to the poorest of the poor, to the hopeless and condemned and forsaken; they preached about the love of God and tried to express that Love in deeds of kindness and compassion among the despised and wretched. In large numbers, as the records of Methodism clearly prove, and indeed the history of England in the eighteenth century is itself a witness to the beneficent consequences, the common people gave welcome to the evangelists; they crowded to the Methodist preaching-houses, joined the Societies, attended the weekly classes, took part in the love feasts, supported the open-air meetings, lustily sang the gospel hymns, engaged in the neighbourly ministrations,

began to feel a new sense of worth and citizenship in contrast with the drear and dismal conditions in which their daily lives were spent.

The Methodists put much emphasis on the urgent summons to flee from the wrath to come. Starting with a belief in the depravity of human nature, they accepted the New Testament assertion that 'all have sinned and come short of the glory of God'. 'There is none righteous, no, not one.' Human nature was depraved because of inherited sin, aggravated by the committing of personal sin. 'Original sin', said John Wesley, 'was the corruption of the nature of every man, whereby man is in his own nature inclined to evil.'¹ Personal sin was yielding to that evil inclination. Because of sin the sinner came under condemnation and the wrath of God descended upon him. Unless he repented, accepting the Divine plan of salvation, he would ultimately be flung into the fires of eternal hell. Preaching before the University of Oxford on Sunday, April 14, 1742, John Wesley described to the assembled professors and students the real condition of the natural man in his sleep of sin. 'Darkness covers the earth', he exclaimed, 'and gross darkness the people.' 'The poor unawakened sinner, how much knowledge soever he may have as to other things, has no knowledge of himself.'² 'He sleeps on still, and takes his rest, though hell is moved from beneath to meet him; though the pit from whence there is no return hath opened its mouth to swallow him up. A fire is kindled around him, yet he lays it not to heart.'³ The final condition of the unsaved was vividly portrayed by him when he preached on 'The Great Assize' at St. Paul's Church, Bedford; on Friday, March 10, 1758, before the Honourable Sir Edward Clive, one of the Judges of the Court of Common Pleas, at the opening of the Lent Assizes. 'The wicked', he declared, 'shall be turned into hell, even all the people that forget God.' They will be 'punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power'. They will be 'cast into the lake of fire burning with brimstone'. originally 'prepared for the devil and his angels'; where they will gnaw their tongues for anguish and pain; they will curse God and look upward. There the dogs of hell—pride, malice, revenge, rape, horror, despair—continually devour them. There 'they have no rest, day or night, but the smoke of their torment

¹ J. Wesley, *Fifty-three Sermons*, p. 160.

² *Ibid.*, p. 27.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

ascendeth for ever and ever'. For 'their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.'¹

Such was the kind of wrath Methodist preachers depicted and their listeners were urged to avoid. A way of escape had been opened. The guilty sinner, the hardened criminal, the malefactor, the transgressor, could be 'justified by faith'. They could enter into a New Dispensation, they could come under Grace, they need no longer be under condemnation and have 'the spirit of bondage . . . to fear', but receive the spirit of adoption whereby they could cry, 'Abba, Father'. Henceforth they could sing, 'My God is reconciled, His pardoning voice I hear, He owns me for his child, I can no longer fear.' Before the century closed multitudes of the poor people had heard this gospel, had received it into their hearts to the transforming of their lives, and had allied themselves with the Methodist Societies.

Those in prison, cut off by the laws of the land and the punitive walls from fellowship with their wives and children, sequestered in disease-ridden pestilential places, numbers of them chained like beasts in dens, many awaiting the last hour of life in solitary cells, the gates of mercy closed on them, must have heard with wild surmise the message of grace and forgiveness and the tidings of a heavenly, as well as a human, concern for them. John Wesley in 1761 wrote in his *Journal* and to the public newspapers these words: 'Of all the seats of woe, on this side hell, few exceed or even equal Newgate. If any region of horror could exceed it a few years ago, Newgate in Bristol did; so great was the filth, the stench, the misery and wickedness.'² And again: 'You may easily be convinced of this, by going into either Ludgate or Newgate. What a scene appears as soon as you enter! The very place strikes terror into your soul. How dark and dreary! How unhealthy and unclean! How void of all that might minister comfort!'³

But the worst conditions were never made known. There was a hidden cruelty. Thousands were incarcerated, innocent and guilty together, and compelled to spend weeks and months in an inhuman morass where the malaria of evil ate into the soul. Undismayed, the Methodists went into these haunts to speak about a dayspring from on high, to minister such comforts as

¹ J. Wesley, *Fifty-three Sermons*, p. 198.

² *Journal*, January 2, 1761. *London Chronicle*, January 6-8, 1761.

³ *Works*, vol. 8, p. 173.

they might, to declare the worth of each individual soul in God's sight, to proclaim liberty to the captive. Critics of this grand work have been very hard to convince. Some even yet consider that the Methodist gospel was but a drug and opiate, merely chloroform. But authentic and exulting voices rose like psalms from dungeons and gallows in joyful clarity of intelligent witness to the reality of spiritual change. 'This is the happiest day I ever saw in my life!' 'Who can express the joy and peace I now feel.' 'Death has no sting for me.' 'I am quite happy.' 'Welcome, halter.' 'Welcome, gallows.' 'I have no fear of death.' 'I feel myself happy.' 'Death is nothing to us.' 'How happy I am.' 'We have no fear of death.' 'I have peace within.' In respect of certain criminals, it was said that 'joy was visible in all their faces'. 'All of them received their punishment with perfect calm'; they 'appeared like giants refreshed with new wine'. One man, the shadows of death dark upon him, 'rejoiced with joy unspeakable' as they sang the hymn, 'O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise'. Another might almost have used the words of one of the martyrs—namely, that his heart was full of flowers and fountains.¹ The dungeon in which he was confined when pressed as a soldier at Bradford, John Nelson described as 'much worse than a hog's sty'; yet 'It was a paradise to me. . . . We sang hymns almost all night.'²

To the working classes and the common people of the eighteenth century, Methodism brought a large gift of opportunity in the form of invitation and encouragement to share in religious activities. Nothing like that had ever been offered to them before. It was unique, and it was rich in significance for the future of England. Their position in the State was one of subjection and obedience; they were hewers of wood and drawers of water. They had never been allowed—sternly, the contrary—to take any part in the shaping, organization, and management of the political, social, economic, and religious affairs of the nation. They had no political vote, no voice in the fixing of wages, no share in determining and revising conditions of employment and labour, no representatives in Parliament, no newspapers, no means of presenting and pleading their views except by petitions which more often than not were ignored. They had nothing to do with the making of laws;

¹ *Infra*, section 3, chapter 1, pp. 198–202.

² W. W. Stamp, *Wesleyan Methodism in Bradford*, p. 11.

theirs but to obey and suffer. The aristocracy held the reins and whip of government. Parliament was aristocracy's preserve like the park and grounds of an estate; Parliament was staffed from the aristocracy, now by craft, now by graft, not infrequently by both. Executive and administrative positions were filled by the nominees of the nobility. Put broadly, the peerage commanded the whole of the armed forces, Army, Militia, Navy. In local affairs, squirearchy was almost supreme. The land, the minerals, belonged, it might be said, to coats-of-arms. As Justices of the Peace, the rich and exalted administered the laws. In that capacity they could summon forth the military and the might of the sword to suppress any risings on the part of the submerged multitudes. Charters from the Crown gave monopolies in trade and industry to the affluent and influential and strengthened their hold on local government. The schools of learning were the precincts, for the most part, of the well-to-do; in the Established Church, they occupied the chief posts and citadels of power. The working classes were in the grip of authority and were enjoined from the pulpits to be reverent, submissive and quiescent, keeping their proper stations!

Imagine the amazement, therefore, when the Methodists broke and sang their way into such a system, daring to invite the lower orders to engage in religious exercises and activities. It was a tremendous hour in English history and the magnitude of the meaning of that hour has scarcely yet been measured. Very far from being an anodyne, the urgent and compelling message of the Methodists was a summons to put spiritual sloth aside and accept duties and responsibilities and to play a full part in the arena where the 'immortal garland was to be run for, not without dust and heat'. All members of Methodist Societies were expected to use and not hide their talents; faith was to be expressed in works. The reality of their religion was to be attested 'by attending upon all the ordinances of God', such as 'the public worship of God; the ministry of the Word, either read or expounded; the Supper of the Lord; family and private prayer; searching the Scriptures; and fasting or abstinence'. Attending the band meetings, as they were exhorted to do, they were expected to give utterance to their thoughts, desires and experiences; they were encouraged to speak 'freely and plainly', and 'in order' concerning the state of their souls. They were asked to confess their faults, whether 'in thought,

word, or deed', not forgetting to describe the kind of 'temptations' to which they had been subject.¹

To become a member of the class meeting was considered obligatory on each and every Methodist. The Societies were divided into small sections or groups called 'classes'. These classes were to meet weekly, all the members attending, every one in due course speaking about his experience and sometimes engaging in public prayer. If any new enterprise were proposed in the name of the class, or on behalf of the Society, such as the formation of another Methodist cause in an adjoining neighbourhood, the establishment of cottage prayer-meetings, or visiting and relieving the distressed, all the members were supposed to share in the undertaking and do their best to make the venture a success.

In daily contacts with their fellows, they were commanded to seek and strive to do good 'to all men'. 'Doing good' meant not merely a care and concern for the physical circumstances and distresses of others, though they were expected to show that compassion, but also care and concern for their spiritual well-being 'by instructing, reproving, or exhorting all they have intercourse with'. To carry out the injunction meant that every Methodist became in some degree a teacher, judge, and preacher, something entirely new and novel among the untutored and illiterate masses of the eighteenth century.

As the Movement extended, additional opportunities unfolded to individual Methodists. From time to time an audacity of initiative was required as well as judgement and wisdom. The Holy War, to use Bunyan's phrase, involved both strategy and tactics and the common soldier must needs carry a general's baton in his knapsack. Capacity to plan and execute might be asked of one man, or a small group of men, and sometimes of women. How much the ordinary, often obscure, member contributed both to the pioneering and the success of Methodism has never been made known, perhaps because it was incalculable and immeasurable.

In addition to sharing in the general exercises of the Methodist fellowship the common people had the opportunity of taking up official positions in the local Societies. The larger number of these positions were filled by the laity. The average man might become a leader, a steward, a visitor, a trustee, a local preacher, possibly a travelling preacher. There were no academic tests;

¹ *Works*, vol. 8, p. 271.

the possession of spiritual gifts and graces were deemed to be the proof of fitness, reinforced by a lively enthusiasm and an experience of conversion.

As leader of a class or band, he was given the responsibility of watching over the souls of a number of his fellows. The number might be five, ten or twelve. Every week at an appointed place, perhaps in the Society room, perhaps in his own house, he met his class-mates. On him devolved the duty of collecting weekly the contributions of a penny from each person, the accounting for the same by marking the amounts opposite the names on the class papers, the handing of the money to the stewards, usually once a week. In the early days he visited the members in their homes; doing that in the course of time became very difficult and tended to diminish. At the weekly class meetings members related their religious experiences, the leader acting as guide, philosopher and friend, rebuking if need be, encouraging and advising. His position as a leader entitled him to attend the leaders' meetings, where matters spiritual and economic were discussed as touching the welfare of the Society. In later years these little local parliaments of leaders became very important when matters of controversy in the Connexion as a whole were referred to them, and leaders, stewards, and trustees began to have a voice in the shaping of large policy.

Strange that such offices should be held by uneducated and poverty-stricken people, strange to the ideas prevailing in the eighteenth century, but stranger still that they could be occupied by women. It was a new departure and development in English religious history, this exaltation of the female sex to government in the Societies and to the exercise of pastoral oversight.

From the beginning a large number of women took an active part in the Methodist Movement. John Wesley himself came to make liberal use of them; it might be claimed that the emancipation of womanhood began with him. In 1739 women were appointed to be leaders of the bands at Bristol; on Monday, April 9, for instance, 'Esther Deschamps was by lot chose leader' of one band, and 'Anne Williams' of another.¹ After the Methodist Society had existed at the Foundery for more than two years John Wesley drew up a list of the leaders. 'Each class consisted of not more than six or seven persons. In no instance did a man lead a class of females.' As the women-folk comprised the majority of members in the Society, they had a large majority

¹ *John Wesley's Letters*, vol. 1, p. 296. *Wesley Historical Society Proceedings*, vol. 5, p. 4.

of leaders; the numbers actually being forty-seven as compared with nineteen.¹ In the leaders' meetings the women could out-vote the men if occasion arose. If the Foundry Society be taken as an example, then the women must have wielded very considerable influence indeed wherever Methodism won its widening way.

Another office occupied by laymen in the Connexion was that of steward, whose particular task it was to manage 'the temporal affairs of the Society'. From the earliest days the weekly pennies were brought to him for distribution among the poor and the afflicted. In the course of time, his duties multiplied and became ever more important. Stewards were appointed to manage the affairs of the Circuits and give oversight, especially in regard to ways and means, to the various social and financial projects and problems. Stewards were needed in the Societies, the Circuits, the chapels, the day-schools, the poor-houses; the loan funds, the medical services, the missionary work, the Christian Community and the Strangers' Friend Societies required their attention. The mere recital of these ramifications proves the importance and distinction attaching to the stewardships; it might be claimed that the stewards were Chancellors of the Exchequer in miniature; a measure of intelligence, integrity of character, devotion to the cause, some degree of financial ability were looked for. Towards the end of the century the stewards, in association with other laymen, were invited to express views and opinions on matters of doctrine and ecclesiastical propriety. It came to pass that the stewards were also empowered to exercise a kind of spiritual oversight over the activities of the travelling preachers. If a travelling preacher failed either to administer the rules of the Connexion or preach the Methodist doctrine, or if his life did not seem to harmonize with his preaching, the stewards could inform the minister.² Such authority elevated both the steward and the office he filled.

Another office open to the lowliest was that of sick visitor. The steward in the early days distributed the weekly pennies among the sick and distressed. 'But it was not long before the Stewards found a great difficulty with regard to the sick. Some were ready to perish before they knew of their illness; and when they did know, it was not in their power . . . to visit them so often as they desired.'³ Calling the members of the London

¹ Stevenson, *City Road Chapel*, p. 29.

² In this case the minister was an ordained clergyman who had become a Methodist preacher. *Works*, vol. 8, p. 262.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

Society together, Wesley 'showed how impossible it was for the Stewards to attend all that were sick in all parts of the town'. He asked how many among them were willing to supply this lack of service, and a larger number volunteered than was necessary. Choosing forty-six whom he judged to be of 'the most tender, loving spirit', he 'divided the town into twenty-three parts, and desired two of them to visit the sick in each division'.¹ In all their dealings with the sick they had to be 'plain and open, mild, tender, patient', and 'cleanly'. Reviewing the work later, he claimed that many lives had been saved, 'many sicknesses healed, much pain and want prevented or removed' and 'many mourners comforted'.² How far the system extended and how long it continued Methodist history does not indicate, but it seems certain that throughout the century Methodists in all parts of the land engaged in and supported the visitation of the sick as an indispensable part of their religious duty.

With the formation of the Christian Community in 1772 organized regular visits to the workhouses in London were inaugurated. The practice lasted for more than one hundred and fifty years. When Strangers' Friend Societies were established in various towns and cities visitors were appointed and systematic visitation and charity became essential features of the philanthropic activities. The visitors were expected to be persons 'of an unblameable character, capable of instructing those they visit in the way of righteousness and praying with and for them'.³ They were urged to recommend the habit of cleanliness with the intent, 'as far as possible, to let fresh air into the place they dwell, to keep the floor clean swept and dry'. As the money allocated was a sacred trust, the visitors were expected to 'use the utmost scrupulosity and care in laying it out'.⁴ Addressing the visitors as a whole, Dr. Adam Clarke reminded them that they were called 'to comfort the feeble-minded, to support the weak, to visit and relieve the Fatherless and the Widows, to remove, or alleviate every species of distress and misery among the people—to prevent untimely deaths, and to rescue immortal spirits from the pit of destruction'.⁵

The office of trustee was a later creation. It was more circumscribed in scope and opportunity for service. When John Wesley began to erect the Methodist building at the Horsefair

¹ *Works*, vol. 8, p. 263.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Methodist Magazine*, 1798, p. 420.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 421.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 422.

in Bristol, he intended to invest the premises in the hands of feoffees. Whitefield and other friends strongly advised him to retain the property in his own hands. Eventually, he followed their advice, and did the same with the next two buildings that were erected, the Foundery in London and the Orphan House in Newcastle. With the erection of further buildings, he found it impossible to retain individual control and administration: He sought the help of trustees. In every case they were laymen. Retaining the right to appoint preachers to conduct services in the buildings, John Wesley nominated trustees. As the number of Methodist chapels and centres increased the power and importance of the trustees grew. In most cases well-to-do members of Methodist congregations were appointed. But in some instances ordinary artisans and general labourers became trustees. Their duties were mainly financial in the sense of raising the subscriptions and donations to pay for the properties and maintaining of them in good repair; in addition, it was their care to safeguard the premises against misuse or sacrilege. Towards the end of the century the trustees became even more important. Their power was indicated by the attitude of the Birstal and Dewsbury trustees, who set Wesley and the Connexion at defiance and caused them to erect alternate premises. By the Plan of Pacification, the trustees were given equal status with the leaders and stewards in voice and vote and verdict on certain controversial questions such as the choice of hours for services and the administration of the Sacrament. Controversy on those points was at its climax in 1797 and many trustees played a prominent part; some went in a body to the Conference to request a consideration of their point of view. When the split came certain groups of trustees took their chapels over with them to the New Connexion. At the Horsefair in Bristol the trustees were strong enough to defy the authority of Conference and forbid their pulpit to the appointed preacher. In consequence, the major part of the congregation forsook the place along with the preacher and another chapel was erected in King Street, a few hundred yards away.

Preaching the gospel was perhaps the most exalted and influential position to which representatives of the common people might aspire in Methodism. Two kinds of lay preaching were developed, the 'local' and the 'itinerant'. The local preacher was able to follow his daily occupation, fulfilling his preaching engagements in such leisure as he had, mostly on

Sundays. The itinerant or travelling preacher gave all his time preaching and visiting. There was no standard of examination in any academic sense. Spiritual gifts and graces, combined with zeal and passion and efficacy in saving souls, were the virtues looked for.

Wesley went further and began to employ women as preachers. Always regarding his preaching places as houses, later as chapels, but never as churches, he did not feel himself bound by the Pauline injunction enjoining silence on women in the church. 'God owns women', he once exclaimed, 'in the conversion of sinners, and who am I that I should withstand God?'¹ Grace Murray and Mary Bosanquet were among his first women preachers. The former travelled with Wesley on several occasions and often exercised her gifts in his presence. The latter, afterwards the wife of the Rev. Fletcher of Madeley, preached on several occasions. Sarah Peters was not a recognized preacher, but she must have acted in that capacity when ministering to the convicts in Newgate Gaol. Sarah Crosby was undoubtedly one of the best known of the early Methodist women preachers. Joining the Methodists in 1749 while in London, she migrated to Derby and in 1761 introduced Methodism into that town. In a very short time she had a class of two hundred people under her care, and she began to exhort them in spiritual matters. Informing Wesley of these activities, he immediately replied: 'I do not see that you have broken any laws. Go on calmly and steadily.'² Removing to Leeds a few years later, she entered a sphere of greater influence. In 1777 she remarked that she had travelled 960 miles, attended over two hundred public and more than six hundred private meetings. Some authorities have identified her with Sarah Williamson in *Adam Bede*. The activities of Dinah Morris portrayed by George Eliot reveal the importance and influence of women preachers among the Methodists. The Rector of Brixton is reported to have said to Dinah: 'Your Society sanctions women's preaching.' 'It doesn't forbid them', she immediately replied, 'when they've a clear call to the work, and when their ministry is owned by the conversion of sinners and the strengthening of God's people. Mrs. Fletcher . . . was the first woman to preach in the Society . . . when she was Miss Bosanquet, and Mr. Wesley approved of her undertaking.'³

¹ E. D. Bebb, *Nonconformity and Social and Economic Life*, p. 170.

² *Wesley Historical Society Proceedings*, vol. 14, p. 106.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

There were women preachers in the Norwich Circuit during 1785; one was Mary Sewell, a class leader in the Thurlton Society.¹ The Circuit register makes reference to another woman 'preacher: 'We give the right hand of fellowship to Sally Mallett, and shall have no objection to her being a preacher in our Connexion so long as she continues to preach the Methodist Doctrine and attends to our Discipline.' In a footnote is added: 'You receive this by order of Mr. Wesley and the Conference.'² Other notable preachers were Ann Cutler of the Bradford District, Hester Ann Rogers, the wife of a Methodist travelling preacher, and Mrs. Bråmmah, who was reported to have gone 'from house to house . . . gathering up the backsliders, visiting the sick and praying with the people in general'.³

Naturally, the highest of the opportunities presented to the Methodist members of the working classes was of becoming ministers of the gospel. Wesley did not call them ministers. He regarded them of a lower order, not having been ordained, so he called them assistants and helpers. In regard to their qualifications, the Conference of 1780 said: 'We admit no one as a Travelling Preacher unless we judge him to have Grace, Gifts, and Fruit, so we cannot receive anyone as such any longer than he retains those qualifications.'⁴ It was possible for men of but little education according to human standards to be received into the ministerial ranks. In 1796, a correspondent to the *Arminian Magazine* confessed that 'many of our preachers are men of mean birth, without education, accustomed to earn their livelihood by manual labour. . . . Their manners may be unpolished, their language coarse, the sound of their voices unharmonising, and their expression vulgar, yet, with all their defects, they may preach with power, and be instrumental in bringing many souls to repentance.'⁵

John Nelson, a stonemason, had no special qualification for the work of the ministry. He was chosen by John Wesley because he had shown much enthusiasm in the preaching of the gospel in the neighbourhood of Birstal. John Haine was a very poor man when he became a Methodist preacher, and when he died he had not sufficient of this world's goods to pay the funeral expenses. The son of a common soldier, Samuel Bradburn was

¹ *Wesley Historical Society Proceedings*, vol. 3, p. 74.

² *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 74.

³ *History of Wesleyan Methodism in Congleton*, p. 46.

⁴ *Arminian Magazine*, 1780, p. 622.

⁵ Pp. 368-9.

born in 1751 while his parents were on board a man-of-war in the Straits of Gibraltar. His attendance at school a few years later was made possible by the payment of a penny a week, but he left at the end of a fortnight on the plea that his parents could not afford the additional charge of one halfpenny a week. That completed his education. At the age of nineteen he joined the Methodists. Before many months passed he had become a local preacher. He was a success, and at the age of twenty-three he was accepted as a travelling preacher. In this capacity his natural gifts developed more rapidly. He earned the title of 'the Demosthenes of Methodism'; Jabez Bunting, later described as 'the Pope of Methodism', was so impressed by his preaching that he used to walk regularly from Oldham to Manchester and back to hear him. At the age of forty-eight, Bradburn reached the highest position that Methodism could offer. He became President of the Conference just at the time when the Connexion needed a firm and kindly hand.¹

Methodism also opened to the lower orders the opportunities to engage in social enterprises and practise the social virtues. Among the multitudes, many got their first ideas of social welfare by contact with the Methodists and a social conscience developed. 'I shall endeavour to shōw', declared John Wesley delivering his third discourse on 'The Sermon on the Mount', 'that Christianity is essentially a social religion; and that to turn it into a solitary religion is indeed to destroy it.'² In harmony with that conception of religion, he formed his disciples into small groups called Societies and gave them regulations which required the exercise of the social virtues. In all cases the Societies were divided into smaller groups, described as bands and classes. The weekly meetings of the bands and classes were expressions of social as well as religious duties and fellowship. Some of the hymns they sang carried the neighbourly emphasis and the call of a religion not solitary—such hymns as

'Help us to help each other, Lord,
Each other's cross to bear,
Let each his friendly aid afford,
And feel his brother's care';

'To serve the present age,
My calling to fulfil,
O may it all my powers engage
To do my Master's will.'

¹ Blanchard, *Life of S. Bradburn*, p. 203.

² *Fifty-three Sermons*, p. 329.

It was impossible to be a good Methodist without engaging in social activities. The rules demanded it. Methodists everywhere were told to do no harm to others, but to be diligent in good works. They were requested to abstain from 'fighting, quarrelling, brawling, brother going to law with brother, returning evil for evil'. They were instructed to do good unto all men, even 'to their bodies . . . by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping them that are sick, or in prison'.¹ They were asked to give 'alms of such things as they possessed'.² In making what money they could in the daily routine of business life, they must never gain it at the expense of the souls and bodies of others. These injunctions were not merely the opinion of their leaders; they were the will of God clearly set forth in the Scriptures.

Not satisfied with expounding the Methodist doctrines of social duty, John Wesley made it possible for the poorest of the poor to make contributions to social well-being. The classes were organized in such a way as to make social obligations inescapable. Sharing in weekly fellowship, they engaged in social exercises; paying their pennies every week, they were contributing in some degree to the support of the sick and the distressed, the poor and the friendless. Special collections at preaching services were frequently made for the same compassionate and ameliorative purposes. The burdens of others were on the hearts of all. To a Methodist official the social obligation became even more emphatic. As a class leader it was his duty to collect the weekly pence for the benefit of the poor. His chief task, of course, was to care for souls, but he was told he could not do this satisfactorily unless he looked after the material well-being. In times of sickness, he visited the members, brought a measure of relief to them when necessary, and helped them in distress. As a steward, his social duties increased; the resources for relieving the poor were in his hands. Wesley instructed him never to give 'either an ill word or an ill look' to them who were compelled to ask for aid. 'Do not hurt them if you cannot help.' In the early days of the Movement, he met his fellow stewards every Thursday to consider how best to bring 'relief to the sick, as everyone had need', and then with the residue of the slender income to help 'those who appeared to be in the most pressing want'.³ Later sick visitors were appointed with instructions to call thrice weekly and always to be ready 'to do anything for them'.⁴

¹ *Works*, vol. 8, p. 270.

² *Ibid.*, p. 274.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

Methodists were encouraged to share with John Wesley himself in schemes of social welfare. His day-school, his poor-house, his medical service, his loan funds, the workhouse visitations, and the Strangers' Friend Societies called to them. The seeds are there of much that has burgeoned since; the acorns have grown into oak trees; the leaven has been at work in the whole lump and gamut of England's life; the Evangelical Revival was a Social Renaissance in the best sense and significance; the concern of the Old Testament prophets for social justice and social betterment came afresh to England in the preaching and practice of John Wesley and his followers; the potencies which later began to press on the Houses of Parliament in London dwelt in Methodist Societies and class meetings and fellowships; the sense of bearing one another's burdens was destined sooner or later to awaken the national conscience and be incorporated in statutes; purely secular historians, if the phrase may be used, may have overlooked the significance of the Methodist Movement.

Methodism gave opportunities for economic experiments and adventures. Preaching on the text, 'Lay not up for yourselves treasure upon earth', John Wesley concluded that we are not forbidden 'to provide things honest in the sight of all men'. 'We ought, therefore, to use all diligence in our calling, in order to owe no man anything.' Neither are we forbidden, he argued, 'to provide for our children, and for those of our household. . . . Every man ought to provide the plain necessities of life, both for his own wife and children; and to put them into a capacity for providing for themselves, when he is gone hence.'¹ It was our duty to provide 'the plain necessities of life; not delicacies; not superfluities; and that by diligent labours'. Of those engaged in business undertakings, he said: 'We are not forbidden to lay up, from time to time, what is needful for the carrying on our worldly business, in such a measure and degree as is sufficient to answer the foregoing purposes; in such measure as, first to owe no man anything; secondly, to provide for ourselves the necessities of life; and thirdly, to furnish those of our own house with them while we live, and with the means of procuring them when we are gone to God.'²

Discussing the controversial question of the 'use of money', he criticized the contention of the old philosophers that, 'in order to banish all vice at home', all the money should be

¹ *Fifty-three Sermons*, p. 407.

² *Ibid.*, p. 408.

thrown into the sea. Such advice, he declared, was 'mere empty rant'. Gold and silver, he argued, is 'an excellent gift of God, answering the noblest ends. In the hands of His children it is food for the hungry; drink for the thirsty; raiment for the naked; it gives to the traveller and the stranger where to lay his head. By it we may supply the place of an husband to the widow, and of a father to the fatherless. We may be a defence for the oppressed, a means of health to the sick, of ease to them that are in pain; it may be as eyes to the blind, as feet to the lame; yea, a lifter up from the gates of death.'¹ Recognizing the importance of 'this valuable talent', he urged all his followers to gain as much as possible. 'It is our bounden duty to do this', he maintained. 'We ought to gain all we can, without buying gold too dear, without paying more for it than is worth.'² Believing the pursuit of money to be not only legitimate, but also a religious necessity, he advised his followers to get all they could 'by honest industry', by using 'all possible diligence', and losing 'no time' about the business.³ 'Gain all you can', he said, 'by common sense, by using in your business all the understanding which God has given you.'⁴

In fact, Methodists in business were summoned to put enthusiasm into efforts to achieve financial success. According to John Wesley, it was the right and proper thing to do. It could even be regarded as a religious duty, carrying with it something of Divine sanction. But, Wesley added, 'Having gained all you can by honest wisdom and unwearied diligence, the second rule of Christian prudence is, save all you can. Do not throw the precious talent into the sea.'⁵ Further, 'Having first gained all you can and, secondly, saved all you can, then give all you can'.⁶ That was the final justification for the pursuit of money. Giving all they could, they would become 'wise and faithful stewards' of the 'precious talent', so that when the final judgement came and the Lord began to inquire, 'How didst thou employ the worldly goods which I lodged in thy hands?' they would be able to make acceptable answer.⁷

Some precepts in detail followed. Methodists were to refrain from 'using many words in buying or selling', from 'the giving or taking things on usury, that is, unlawful interest', from 'putting on of gold or costly apparel', from 'laying up treasures upon earth', from 'borrowing without a probability of paying',

¹ *Fifty-three Sermons*, p. 704.

² *Ibid.*, p. 705.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 708.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 709.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 709.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 712.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 727.

or 'taking up goods without a possibility of paying for them'.¹ They should give evidence of their 'fellowship by 'employing' those 'of the household of faith', 'preferably to others', thus 'buying one of another, helping each other in business', with 'all possible diligence and frugality', and even 'denying themselves'.²

Officials in the Societies were expected to be exemplary; they were to set a standard in care and diligence; their influence would be considerable on others. The class leaders, for instance, learned much about the ministering and missionary value of the weekly pennies; in later days they were requested to find out from members of the classes 'What it is in business that hinders them in the narrow way. . . . Great pains must be taken with such persons to make them deeply sensible, that a lawful occupation, properly managed, is no hindrance at all to religion; yea, that idleness is totally incompatible with the spirit of true devotion; that if they do not prosper they must look for the cause . . . in their own breast, and search for it as if they would a thief or a murderer. And they must be urged to cast out this evil, as they would a thief out of their houses.' The rule against 'borrowing without a probability of paying' was to be enforced strictly, and leaders were to be the first in obedience.³

Perhaps more than others among the Methodists, the stewards entered of necessity into knowledge and administration of affairs. The rules which Wesley enunciated in general applied with special emphasis to them, but even so it would have been impossible for them to fulfil their duties without engaging in economic exercises. Theirs it was 'to manage the temporal things of the Society, to receive the subscriptions and contributions, to expend what is needful from time to time . . . to keep an exact account of all receipts and expenses'. John Wesley told them to 'be frugal', to 'save everything that can be saved honestly', to 'spend no more than you receive', to 'contract no debts', to 'have no long accounts', and to 'pay everything within the week'. He confessed with much satisfaction afterwards 'that all these temporal things were done with the utmost faithfulness and exactness'.⁴

Trustees and travelling preachers came under the discipline of hard economic facts. Preaching-houses and chapels had to

¹ *Works*, vol. 8, p. 270.

² *Ibid.*, vol. 8, p. 270.

³ James Wood, *Directions and Cautions to Class Leaders*, p. 10.

⁴ *Works*, vol. 8, p. 262.

be built and they had to be paid for and kept in decent repair. Lessons in income and expenditure and thrifty husbandry had to be learned. Usually the trustees made decisions under the guidance of the travelling preachers, who gained their knowledge from a wider school of experience. Not one of these itinerants in the eighteenth century enjoyed anything other than a very meagre allowance in the form of stipend. They and their households, such as they were, had no light task in making ends meet.

The new and widening opportunities to engage in religious, social, and economic enterprises were not without meaning in the lives and circumstances of the common people. John Wesley claimed that in York, Birstal, London, Bristol, Kingswood, and other centres great improvements could be observed in the outlook and attitude of the people. Some Methodists drawn from humblest circumstance occupied important positions in the Movement itself; numbers were engaged on social activities among their fellow citizens, not a few became captains of industry. Silas Told began to minister to malefactors in Newgate Prison and other London gaols. For more than twenty years he continued to do so and repeatedly ran the risk of the dreaded gaol fever. Henry Longden, born in 1754, was the only surviving child of a family of twenty. At the age of fourteen he was put under a schoolmaster; apprenticed later to a razor-maker, he soon became restless under the severity of the restrictions and ran away from his employer. Eventually joining the Methodists, he soon became a class leader and then a local preacher. In that twofold capacity he visited the sick and distressed and dying, and proved himself a most worthy citizen.¹

The genius of the Methodists in employing the talents of the poorest as the world counts wealth was revealed in the life and work of Jonathan Saville. Born on December 9, 1759, he lost his mother at the age of three. Four years later he was sent to a workhouse and in due time apprenticed to a miner, who treated him brutally. From that cruelty he escaped, only to enter a worse when he sought to learn spinning. He was felled to the ground by a blow from his master's daughter, a virago. He dislocated his thigh. He found it impossible to work or sleep. At intervals he got a little rest by keeping the loose leg in its right position. Suffering torment, he was taken back to the

¹ *Life of Henry Longden*, p. 60.

workhouse, where he received some rough sort of medical attention and treatment. By this time he was a cripple and remained so for the remainder of his life. Stunted in growth because of ill treatment, his tiny, fragile physique earned him the title 'Little Jonathan'. In 1784 he joined the Methodists, and the dwarf, for he was but little more in stature, soon became prayer leader, class leader, and local preacher. In that three-fold capacity he exercised a gracious influence on the whole locality. He lived at Halifax, but sometimes travelled as far as Macclesfield, where he had the opportunity of preaching to some successful business men.¹

Joseph Thompson of Halifax was commonly known as 'Fiddler Thompson'. He served as apprentice under two hard task-masters and then became a travelling fiddler. For a time he traversed the countryside with a pretended female doctor. On one occasion he narrowly escaped death while feigning to hang himself by way of a joke. He was employed as a fiddler on a privateer. His biographer declares that for twelve years he scarcely ever went to bed sober. Eventually he was converted by contact with the Methodists. 'From a despicable sinner', in due time 'he was raised to an estimable character, and though he retained the cognomen of "Fiddler Thompson" to the day of his death, he was highly respected by the Society, sustained the office of a class leader for a number of years, and always showed himself hearty and zealous.'²

Edward Griffith of Frome, class leader, local preacher, and Sunday-school superintendent, abounded in good works. Setting himself the task of conducting open-air services in the streets (fifty-two in number), 'not only did he preach once in every street, corner, lane and alley . . . of his native town, but in some of the most ignorant and benighted parts' he repeatedly held services. In addition 'he visited some thousands of sick persons'.³

Among 'Captains of Industry' growing up among the Methodists were James Bundy of Bristol and Robert Spence of York. They were two notable examples. The former was born of parents who had only 'slender means of support'. His mother died while he was quite young. Joining the Methodists at an early age, he was advised to make 'the Scripture his constant

¹ J. U. Walker, *Methodism in Halifax*, pp. 240-6. *Life of John Birchenall*, pp. 42-3.

² J. U. Walker, *Methodism in Halifax*, pp. 169-71.

³ *History of Methodism in Frome*, pp. 101-6.

rule'. He made a vow always 'to provide things honest in the sight of all men'. And he determined never to be 'slothful in business'. Great success attended his efforts in business. Remembering John Wesley's advice to 'give all you can', he devoted a large part of his savings to assist the poor and spent much of his time visiting and helping the sick; it was estimated that in the course of his life he had made more than 40,000 such visits.¹ Robert Spence, when just a lad of sixteen years, was left without a father, and had to face the world insufficiently trained and instructed. Happily, he became associated with the Methodists at an early age. Before many months had passed he was a class leader and a local preacher. In this double capacity for at least fifty-seven years he became the recognized leader of the Methodists in York and the surrounding neighbourhood. Successful in business, he devoted much of his leisure to the management of the Poor House in the city. He took a prominent part in the establishment of the York Benevolent Society, otherwise called the Strangers' Friend Society, and acted as the treasurer for many years. In 1806 he was nominated for the position of Sheriff; being a Methodist, he refused the appointment and had to pay a fine of one hundred guineas. On his death his work and influence were praised in the local Press, his 'well-doing and liberality to the poor' being emphasized.²

Several members of the Methodist Society in Macclesfield became successful business men in the town. Some of them played a prominent part in municipal affairs; at one time no less than five Aldermen used to attend the Methodist Sunday services. With the progress of the Industrial Revolution, many Methodists in Lancashire and Yorkshire, having received their first training in affairs at the local chapels, found themselves capable of achieving success in their daily vocations. Among the number were the Whitehead Brothers of Rossendale. Beginning in poor circumstances, they gradually extended their business until they possessed and ran a large factory described in glowing terms by Cooke Taylor when on a tour through Lancashire in 1842.³ Samuel Bamford, the Radical reformer of Middleton and Manchester in the early nineteenth century, was of Methodist ancestry. His grandfather's house was the first to be opened to the Methodists in Middleton. 'John and Charles Wesley, George Whitefield, John Nelson, Samuel Taylor, and

¹ *Life of J. Bundy*, p. 48.

² *Life of R. Spence*, p. 182.

³ Cooke Taylor, *Notes of a Tour in the Manufacturing Districts of Lancashire*, pp. 612-6.

others of the old band, were frequent expounders under that humble roof.¹ Richard Oastler, one of the factory reformers of Lancashire and Yorkshire, was brought up in a home where John Wesley was a frequent visitor. On one occasion Wesley took young Oastler in his arms and blessed him. His father was an enthusiastic Methodist.² James Lackington, in his *Confessions* declared that before coming into contact with the Methodists he was 'a thoughtless, careless, wicked boy'. After being associated with them for a time, he 'was then anxious to learn to read, and it was not long before I constantly read five chapters in the Bible every day. . . . If I had never heard the Methodists preach in all probability I should have been at this time a poor, ragged, dirty cobbler. . . . It was through them I got my amiable helpmeet in my first wife. . . . It was also through them that I got the shop in which I first set up for a bookseller. . . . It is very likely that had I never heard these people, I should have been an old drunken, debauched fellow, like the generality of journeymen shoemakers.'³

What happened in Congleton was typical, no doubt, of many other places. According to one authority the Methodists had 'taken hold of the comparatively poor, and . . . lifted them up and bettered their condition. Many a well-to-do man would, at this moment, have been in a state of squalid poverty had not Methodism taken him by the hand. It was she that saved him from rags, put him on his feet, gave him a character and placed him in the path of industry in which he has found both affluence and position.'⁴ Job and John Ridgway of Hanley owed their business achievements to the training they got in the Methodist Society. William Clowes and Hugh Bourne are examples of success in religious pioneering and organization. The former before joining the Methodists at Tunstall was a notorious drunkard and boxer. He had but little schooling; he became a class leader and local preacher. His innate talents found expression in evangelistic adventure; in association with Hugh Bourne and others, he brought into being a new religious denomination which profoundly affected the lives of a multitude of poor people. For many years in this new body, called the Primitive Methodist, he played a leading part; he was recognized, not only as a leader among men, but also as a great

¹ *Passages in the Life of Samuel Bamford*, p. 314.

² W. R. Croft, *Oastler and His Times*, p. 51. *Northern Star*, March 31, 1838.

³ *Confessions*, pp. 179-81. ⁴ *History of Wesleyan Methodism in Congleton*, p. 178.

evangelist. Hugh Bourne, also of Tunstall, was by nature of a shy and retiring disposition. Almost against his bent, he became a Methodist local preacher; his first sermon was preached in the open air, and he kept his hand over his eyes so as not to see the congregation. But that reticent man, with William Clowes as his colleague, laid the foundations of the Primitive Methodist Church. Hugh Bourne knew the value of the lay element in the Wesleyan Methodist denomination and he also knew something of the autocratic tendencies among the travelling preachers. In the new constitution he incorporated the two-to-one principle—two laymen to every minister in all the official courts of the Church. That method of government successfully continued among the Primitive Methodists until Methodist Union in 1932, when Methodists in Great Britain became one denomination.

A distinguished English historian has claimed that 'many of the more self-respecting of the new proletariat found in the Chapel the opportunity for the development of talents and gratification of instincts that were denied expression elsewhere. . . . And in the Chapel-life working men first learnt to speak and organize, to persuade and trust their fellows. . . . It was in the Little Bethel that many of the Working-class Leaders were trained.'¹ One of the objections urged against the early Methodists by the Archbishop of Canterbury at the time was that they tended 'to weaken the natural and civil relations among men, by leading the inferiors . . . to a disesteem of their superiors'.² The love-begotten Duchess of Buckingham complained that the preaching of the Methodists made the lower classes forget their allotted stations in life. Such aristocratic critics shrewdly foresaw that Methodism was destined to lift the poorer classes to higher levels of life. They were right. As the Methodist momentum grew in strength, the tidal waters flowed into the lowliest channels. Methodism brought the hope and joy of opportunity to the submerged poor. It enriched England.

¹ Trevelyan, quoted by *Wesley Historical Society Proceedings*, vol. 15, pp. 139-40.

² *Works*, vol. 8, p. 59.

CHAPTER III

METHODISM DEVELOPED RESPONSIBILITY, DISCIPLINE AND LOYALTY

METHODISM, brought into being and organized by John Wesley, introduced manifold opportunities to the common people to share in fuller life and fellowship and exercise their latent powers. Opportunities bring responsibilities which in turn mean discipline. Members were required to accept the rule of Scripture for their conduct, obey the Methodist regulations, and be subject to the laws of the realm. The sense of stewardship, of trusteeship, received constant emphasis. A man's life was not wholly his own; he was accountable to God for the way in which he used the gifts committed to him. Body and soul, he owed fealty to the Everlasting. Some day, perhaps at any moment, mortal life being uncertain, he must appear before the Lord as Judge, and if found faithful enter into joy, if unfaithful, be condemned to outer darkness. From judgement there was no escape. In a sermon on 'The Good Steward', John Wesley maintained that a man 'has no right to dispose of anything . . . but according to the will of his Lord. For he is not the proprietor of any of these things, but entrusted with them by another; and entrusted on this express condition—that he shall dispose of all as his Master orders.¹ . . . On this condition, he hath entrusted us with our souls, our bodies, our goods and whatsoever other talents we have received.' 'God hath entrusted us with our souls, an immortal spirit, made in the image of God, together with all the powers and faculties thereof, understanding, imagination, memory, will; and a train of affections, either included in it or closely dependent upon it—love and hatred, joy and sorrow, respecting good and evil—desire and aversion, hope and fear, respecting that which is to come.'² 'Now, of all these, it is certain we are only stewards. God has entrusted us with these powers and faculties, not that we may employ them according to our own will, but according to the express orders which He has given us. . . . God has, secondly, entrusted us with our bodies . . . with the organs of sense; of sight, hearing and the rest. . . . None of these are lent to us in such a sense as to leave us at liberty to use them as we please for a season.'³

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who

¹ *Fifty-three Sermons*, p. 716.

² *Ibid.*, p. 717.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 718.

'It is on the same terms that He imparted to us that most excellent talent of speech. . . . To Him we are equally accountable for the use of our hands and feet, and all the members of our body. These are so many talents which are committed to our trust, until the time appointed by the Father. Until then, we have the use of all these; but as stewards, not as proprietors.'¹

'God has entrusted us, thirdly, with a portion of worldly goods; with food to eat, raiment to put on, and a place where to lay our head; with not only the necessities, but the conveniences of life. Above all, he has committed to our charge that precious talent which contains all the rest, money: indeed, it is unspeakably precious if we are wise and faithful stewards of it.'

'God has entrusted us, fourthly, with several talents which do not properly come under any of these heads. Such is bodily strength; such are health, a pleasing person, an agreeable address; such are learning and knowledge . . . with all the other advantages of education. Such is the influence which we have over others, whether by their love and esteem of us, or by power; power to do them good or hurt, to help or hinder them in the circumstances of life.'²

As to the great judgement day when every one must give an account of his stewardship, Wesley declared that the Lord will inquire: 'How didst thou employ thy soul? . . . How didst thou employ the body wherewith I entrusted thee? . . .'³ How didst thou employ the worldly goods which I lodged in thy hands?'⁴ 'Hast thou been a wise and faithful steward with regard to the talents of a mixed nature which I lent thee?' The nature of the sentence to be imposed will be determined by the kind of answers that are given to these questions. But when the judgement has been passed, it would impose 'a state which admits of no change throughout everlasting ages.'⁵

In sermons on 'The Use of Money' and 'The Command not to lay up Treasure', Wesley expounded the same idea of personal stewardship. Declaring that it was legitimate for a man to get all the money he could, it must not be done by hurting oneself or others, or even the King in regard to lawful customs. Having obtained this precious gift, it must never be used for self-indulgence, such as 'high eating and drinking, fine clothes and fine houses, state and equipage, gay pleasures and diversions'.⁶

¹ *Fifty-three Sermons*, p. 718.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 727.

² *Ibid.*, p. 719.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 728.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 726.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 416.

Although urged to save all that was possible, Christian people had to be on their guard against heaping up riches, lest it incurred the anger of their Lord. He quoted from the Scriptures: 'How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!' 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.' 'O ye rich, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?'¹ To grasp the importance and significance of John Wesley's lucid and austere preaching on individual responsibility and stewardship, it must be remembered that he spoke in such terms to multitudes assembled in the open as well as the crowds flocking to the chapels and churches to hear him. In later years the sermons themselves were published in cheap form, so as to secure a wide circulation, which they did.

For those who became Methodists, the conception of personal responsibility in every phase of life was even more sternly emphasized. They were reminded that it was one of the cardinal doctrines in the Bible which they were enjoined to study regularly and diligently. Searching the Scriptures became a daily quest with most Methodists. The Bible enters into their hymns, their prayers, their common speech.

The exercise and discipline of responsibility fell upon the officials of Methodism in their positions as stewards, leaders, trustees, and preachers. They had regular duties to perform and were kept in office only as long as they were faithful in the doing of them. At frequent intervals they had to give account either to John Wesley himself or one of his assistants; in very many instances it was a new phase in moral and spiritual development.

Upon the Methodist people a strict discipline was imposed. They had to obey the rules of the band meetings, the classes, the Society. The bands were regarded for the most part as select groups of people devoted to spiritual exercises; they agreed 'to meet once a week at the least, to come punctually at the hour appointed . . . to begin . . . exactly at the hour, with singing and prayer'. In the course of the meetings they were called upon to speak freely about the state of their own souls, confessing their faults. Such questions as 'Do you desire to be told of your faults? Do you desire to be told of all your faults?' were put to them frequently.² Other questions of a like nature called for answer. For example, 'Do you desire that everyone

¹ *Fifty-three Sermons*, p. 409.

² *Works*, vol. 8, p. 272.

of us should tell you, from time to time, whatsoever is in his heart concerning you? . . . Do you desire we should tell you whatsoever we think, whatsoever we fear, whatsoever we hear concerning you? Do you desire, that in doing this . . . we should cut to the quick and search your heart to the bottom?' 'Is it your desire and design to be on this and all other occasions, entirely open, so as to speak everything that is in your heart without exception, without disguise and without reserve?' 'What known sins have you committed since our last meeting? What temptations have you met with? How were you delivered? What have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?'¹ No one could be a member of a band unless he, or she, was prepared to submit to inquisition; for many people it was hard, perhaps harsh, discipline, but large numbers were willing to invite and accept the searching test.

In addition, there were regulations for guidance in daily behaviour. They were required 'neither to buy nor sell on the Lord's day, to taste no spirituous liquor, no dram of any kind, unless prescribed by a Physician, to be at a word both in buying and selling, to pawn nothing, no, not to save life, not to mention the fault of any behind his back, and to stop those short that do'.² They were told 'to wear no needless ornaments such as rings, ear-rings, necklaces, lace, ruffles, to use no needless self-indulgence, such as taking snuff or tobacco, unless prescribed by a Physician'. They had also 'to give alms of such things' as they possessed, to reprove all that sinned in their sight, and 'to be patterns of diligence and frugality'. In regard to what they called 'the ordinances of God', they had 'to be at Church and at the Lord's Table every week, and at every public meeting of the bands, to attend the ministry of the word every morning, unless distance, business or sickness prevent, to use private prayer every day; and family prayer', if at the head of a family. Besides spending as much time as possible in reading and meditating on the Scriptures, they had to observe 'all Fridays in the year' as 'days of fasting or abstinence'.³

How these injunctions operated in the lives of early Methodists is revealed in a letter from Thomas Willis to John Wesley on November 13, 1744. In regard to Rule 1, which required the member 'neither to buy nor sell anything . . . on

¹ *Works*, vol. 8, p. 273.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

the Lord's day', he exclaims: 'I do perform this rule exactly, except selling milk on Sunday mornings, which I believe is a work of necessity and mercy.' He asserts with confidence that he finds no difficulty concerning the regulation 'to taste no spirituous liquors, no drams of any kind, unless prescribed by a Physician', but 'to be at a word both in buying and selling' is not so easy. Continually he keeps the commandment in mind and strives in sincerity to carry it out. The regulation desiring band members 'to pawn nothing, no, not to save life' he has kept absolutely, but is less confident about the injunction 'not to mention the fault of any behind his back'. Realizing that restraint in that respect will test him much, he promises to do his utmost.¹ 'To wear no needless ornaments, such as rings, necklaces, lace, ruffles', etc., presents no great difficulty, but it is otherwise when it comes to refraining from the use of tobacco or snuff. He never takes snuff, but admits that he smokes a little tobacco before going to bed. He would rather not do it, but has been advised to smoke because of an old infirmity.² Concerning the positive commands, he is more hopeful. Out of his scanty income, he gives a portion regularly to the poor. He goes to church every Sunday, fasts every Friday, reads and meditates each day, never forgets to say his prayers.³

Discipline was more widely applied when the General Rules were published in 1743. Not only were Methodists compelled to attend the weekly class meetings, where strict inquiries were likely about their daily conduct, but almost the whole of their behaviour came under rule. For example, they were told to avoid every kind of evil, especially that which was generally practised, such as 'the taking of the name of God in vain; the profaning of the day of the Lord, either by doing ordinary work thereon, or by buying or selling; drunkenness, buying or selling spirituous liquors, or drinking them, unless in cases of extreme necessity; fighting, quarrelling, brawling; brother going to law with brother; returning evil for evil, or railing for railing; the using many words in buying or selling; the buying or selling uncustomed goods; the giving or taking things on usury, that is unlawful interest; uncharitable or unprofitable conversation, particularly speaking evil of magistrates or of ministers; doing to others as we would not they should do unto us; doing what . . . is not for the glory of God, as the "putting on of gold or costly apparel"; The taking such diversions as cannot be used

¹ *Arminian Magazine*, 1778, p. 274. ² *Ibid.*, 1778, p. 275. ³ *Ibid.*, 1778, p. 276.

in the name of the Lord Jesus; the singing those songs, or reading those books, which do not tend to the knowledge or the love of God; softness and needless self-indulgence; laying up treasures upon earth; borrowing without a probability of paying; or taking up goods without a probability of paying for them.¹ But their daily lives were not to be governed merely by prohibitions; they were commanded to exercise themselves in good works on every possible occasion; they were to prove themselves good Methodists by attending public worship, 'the ministry of the word', 'the Supper of the Lord', reading the Bible, engaging in public and private prayer, fasting regularly.²

Even in matters of food and clothing Methodists had to accept a discipline of some severity. In a pamphlet on *Nervous Disorders*, John Wesley told them to guard against intemperance in all things. 'Take no more food than nature requires'; 'abstain from all spirituous liquors'; 'sleep early and rise early.'³ He strongly advised them to give up drinking tea, not only because he believed it was good for themselves, but also because they could by this abstinence give more money to the poor.⁴ He was insistent that they should wear cheap and plain dress. Holding up the Quakers as a pattern in this respect, he recommended his followers to imitate them both in plainness of speech and dress, particularly in the latter. 'Let your apparel be as clean as your situation in life will allow.' Let it 'be cheap, not expensive, far cheaper than others in your circumstances wear'.⁵ 'Wear no gold. . . . Carry no pearls, or precious stones, use no curling of the hair, or costly apparel. . . . Buy no velvets, no silks, no fine linen, no superfluities, no mere ornaments. . . . Wear nothing . . . which is in any kind gay, glistening, or showy. . . . I do not advise women', he remarked, 'to wear rings, ear rings, necklaces, laces . . . or ruffles. . . . Neither do I advise men to wear coloured waistcoats, shining stockings, glittering or costly buckles or buttons, either on their coats or in their sleeves.'⁶ Using Scripture as authority, he contended that the 'wearing of gold, of precious stones, and of costly apparel, together with the curling of hair, is forbidden'.⁷ 'Let an Englishman dress like other Englishmen, not like a Turk or a Tartar. Let an English woman dress like other English women, not like a French woman, or a German.'⁸

¹ *Works*, vol. 8, p. 270.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 498-500.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 469.

² *Ibid.*, p. 271.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 467.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 473. Pamphlet on *Dress*.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. 11, p. 513.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 468.

Reviewing these and other demands upon character, conversation and conduct of the Methodist people, Wesley claimed that they constituted something entirely new and notable. For example, 'making it a rule to abstain from fashionable diversions, from reading plays, romances, or books of rumour, from singing innocent songs, or talking in a merry, gay, diverting manner; your plainness of dress; your manner of dealing in trade; your exactness in observing the Lord's day; your scrupulosity as to things that have not paid custom; your total abstinence from spirituous liquors (unless in cases of necessity); your rule "not to mention the fault of any absent person, in particular of ministers or those in authority", may be justly termed new.'¹ Wesley might have added a further notable fact, the disciplinary authority to expel from membership those whose life and ways were seriously out of chime with such rules and desiderata.

The threat of expulsion was no mere threat. There can be no doubt that frequently it was carried out. On Tuesday, January 24, 1741, a kind of spiritual inquisition was held in the Society at Bristol. John Wesley took account of every person 'to whom any reasonable objection was made'. After examining every case in detail, he gave tickets of membership only to 'those who were sufficiently recommended'. But to those who had been found in fault opportunity was afforded to confess the wrongs done. About forty failed to confess and were immediately expelled.² Before the end of the year thirty others were forbidden the fellowship; in the presence of all the members 'both their names and the reasons why they were excluded' were made known. (The same method of public announcement was adopted later by some of Wesley's preachers.)³ Returning to Newcastle in the early months of 1743, he found that some in the Society were living disobedient and disorderly lives. Reading the rules to them, he excluded sixty-four members; two were removed 'for cursing and swearing, two for habitual Sabbath-breaking, seventeen for drunkenness, two for retailing spirituous liquors, three for quarrelling and brawling, one for beating his wife, three for habitual, wilful lying, four for railing and evil speaking, one for idleness and laziness, and nine and twenty for lightness and carelessness'.⁴ At the beginning of October, 1748, no less than one hundred and

¹ *Works*, vol. 8, p. 354.

³ *Ibid.*, Wednesday, December 9, 1741.

² *Journal*.

⁴ *Ibid.*, March 12, 1743.

seventy members were removed from the roll at Bristol because they refused to attend the weekly fellowship as the rules required. What was done at Bristol and Newcastle was done in other places. The winnowing fan was in Wesley's hand, and he was both resolute and righteous in the use of it.

Even after the death of John Wesley the discipline was not in the least relaxed. According to the *Large Minutes* (containing a record of the Conference resolutions from 1744 to 1789) republished in 1791, some of the old regulations were given fresh insistence. The travelling preachers, for instance, were urged to read the pamphlet entitled *Thoughts on Dress*, and to 'give no Band tickets to any till they have left off superfluous ornaments'. Nor must they give tickets 'to any that wear calashes, high-heads, or enormous bonnets'.¹ They were also advised 'vigorously, but calmly' to 'enforce the rules concerning needless ornaments, drams, snuff and tobacco' and to give no band ticket 'to any man or woman who does not promise to leave them off'.² Lest that was not sufficient warning, they were commanded to preach against 'Sabbath-breaking, dram-drinking, evil speaking, unprofitable conversation, lightness, expensiveness or gaiety of apparel and contracting debts without due care to discharge them'. They were also instructed to warn every Society 'that none who is guilty herein can remain with us'.³

Discipline of that nature and entering into such detail may seem to the mind of the twentieth century to be austerity *in excelsis*, but one must bear in mind the kind of human material with which John Wesley had to deal and the circumstances and conditions of those disjointed times. Many of his disciples belonged to the lowest strata of the population; they were uncouth, uneducated, undisciplined; many had seen wild and lawless bands of rioters roaming the countryside, breaking into houses, destroying machinery, attacking factories, commandeering foodstuffs, frightening the populace; some, perhaps, had taken leading parts in these rough and ruthless excesses; most knew nothing at all about the art and grace of living together in quiet and mutual well-being; social, economic and Christian virtues were almost unknown to them. Their schooling only began when they became Methodists; wise and firm discipline was essential if the Societies were to enjoy health and strength.

In the case of officials, the discipline was still more severe. They had to obey additional injunctions. The class leader had

¹ *Works*, vol. 8, p. 307.

² *Ibid.*, p. 320.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

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to see 'each person in his class once a week . . . to advise, reprove, comfort or exhort them', and 'to meet the Assistant and the Stewards once a week'.¹ To make sure that the leaders performed their tasks satisfactorily, each must be 'diligently examined concerning his method of meeting a class', and this 'with all possible exactness at the quarterly visitation'. Only 'men of sound judgement, . . . truly devoted to God', were to be retained. As to the stewards, it was recommended that they should be changed every two years.

The severest discipline of all usually fell upon the travelling preachers, who were divided into two classes, helpers and assistants, the latter, being senior in status, generally superintendents of Circuits. The helpers were subject to the authority of the assistants. The two categories were under the control of Wesley and the Conference. For the general guidance of the helpers, a list of twelve rules was issued by John Wesley. They were advised to be diligent in all things; 'never be unemployed for a moment, never be triflingly employed. Never while away time neither spend any more time at any place than is strictly necessary.' They must 'be serious' and 'avoid all lightness, jesting and foolish talking'. In relations with the female sex, they were enjoined to 'converse sparingly and cautiously with women, particularly with young women'.² Under no circumstances must they affect the gentleman: 'You have no more to do with this character than with that of a dancing master.'³ They were advised to 'take as little meat, drink and sleep as nature will bear'. Early rising—yes, four o'clock in the morning—was commended, the first hour thereafter to be devoted to prayer, meditation, and reading the Scriptures. Between the hours of six and twelve, certain books should be read to enrich the mind. Specific tasks were allotted to other hours of the day. They were warned against 'clownishness, either in speech or dress'. 'Wear no slouched hat' was a strict command. 'Avoid spirituous liquors', but they could 'take a little lemonade after preaching'.⁴ Even as late as 1791, Conference, receiving them as preachers, these questions were put: 'Do you eat no flesh suppers? No late suppers? Do you eat no more at each meal than is necessary? Are you not heavy or drowsy after dinner? Do you use that kind and that degree of drink which is best both for your body and soul? Do you

¹ *Journal*, Wednesday, April 3, 1771.

² *Works*, vol. 8, p. 309.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 314, 318.

drink water? Why not? Did you ever? Why did you leave off? If not for health, when will you begin again? To-day? How often do you drink wine or ale? Every day? Do you want it? Do you take no snuff, tobacco, drams?"¹ They were desired not to go out for supper and always to be home by nine o'clock.

The assistants were under a very strict regimen. Almost every phase and feature of their pastoral lives were shaped and planned. By 'understanding and loving discipline', they were requested to act diligently and vigorously in enforcing the rules of the Connexion. In addition to private devotions and study, many public duties were theirs. They were expected 'to expound every morning and evening, to meet the united society, the bands, the select society, and the penitents once a week, to visit the classes once a quarter, to hear and decide all differences, to put the disorderly back on trial, and to receive on trial for the bands, to see that the Stewards, the Leaders, and the Schoolmasters faithfully discharge their several offices, to meet the leaders of the bands and classes weekly, and the stewards, and to overlook their accounts'.²

John Wesley always regarded the travelling preachers as his sons in the gospel and entirely subject, therefore, to him and to him alone. The Spartan discipline which he imposed upon himself he believed he could with justice impose on them. There was a period when some among them began to murmur against the severity of his authority, but he refused to relax the discipline. If any disliked his rule and objected to his authority they were quietly told to leave the Connexion; if they attempted defiance, they were expelled from office and membership. Alexander M'Nab at Bath refused to accept Wesley's orders and was sent into exile.³ The discipline continued stern after 1791, the reason being that Conference had acquired all the power hitherto wielded by the Wesleys.

Methodism insisted on allegiance to the State and obedience to the laws of the land. It showed itself to be a loyalist movement. In the early part of the century the critics were swift to accuse it of being and acting otherwise. It was taunted with working deliberately 'against the orders of the Church and State' by bringing congregations together 'in places unlicensed, and after an unauthorized manner'. All its public and private gatherings were maliciously described as 'illegal meetings in

¹ *Works*, vol. 8, pp. 324-5.

² *Ibid.*, p. 261.

³ *Journal*, November 23, 1779. Tyerman, *Life of Wesley*, vol. 3, p. 306.

private houses'.¹ The Society at the Foundry in London was represented at Hicks Hall in May, 1740, as 'a seditious assembly'. Happily, Sir John Gunson, a friend of the Wesleys, was Chairman of the Bench when the case came for trial. He noticed that the name of no individual in particular was mentioned in the indictment; the names of Charles Wesley, J. Hutton, Timothy Lewis, and Howell Harris were added, but Sir John declared the whole proceedings to be illegal.²

Enemies of the Movement attacked 'field preaching', asserting it to be 'in open defiance of Government, . . . notwithstanding the Statute'.³ Methodist preachers were portrayed as being 'evil-minded men', meeting together in the fields, under pretence of religion', and 'may raise riots and tumults or . . . carry on private cabals against the State'. Such activities might 'put into the hands of seditious persons' 'a great opportunity' 'to raise disturbances'.⁴

The fear of a French invasion in support of the Young Pretender began to spread among the upper classes, and the charges against Methodists took on vivid and alarming colour. During the third week of February, 1744, two London newspapers published a report charging the Methodists with causing an insurrection in the county of Staffordshire and setting fire to a house belonging to one of their adversaries.⁵ The charge was entirely false, but the two Wesleys a few weeks later were suspected of seditious conduct and compelled to give an account of their behaviour to a Justice of the Peace. On Saturday, March 10, 1744, Captain Burton, the Wakefield magistrate, published the following notice: 'West Riding of Yorkshire. To the Constable of Birstal, in the said Riding, or Deputy. These are in his Majesty's name, to require and command you to summon Mary Castle of Birstal, aforesaid, and all other such persons as you are informed can give any information against one Wesley, or any other of the Methodist speakers, for speaking any treasonable words or exhortations as praying for the banished, or for the Pretender, &c. to appear before me, and other of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace for the said Riding, at the White Hart in Wakefield; on the 15th of March instant, by ten o'clock in the forenoon, to be examined, and to declare the truth of what they, and each of them know, touching the

¹ *Weekly Miscellany*, May 12, 1739.

² *C. Wesley's Journal*.

³ *Works*, vol. 8, p. 114.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁵ *London Evening Post*, February 16-18, and the *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, February 17.

premises; and you likewise make a return hereof before us on the same day. Fail not. Given under my hand the 10th. of March, 1744. E. Burton.¹

Charles Wesley went to face his accusers. Five of them were cited to appear against him, but, hearing of his arrival at the inn, four were afraid to meet him and returned home. The fifth confessed he had nothing to allege. The three magistrates, Captain Burton, the Rev. Zouch, and Sir Roland Wynn replied to Charles Wesley's inquiry why the public notice had been issued. They had learned, they said, that he had prayed for strangers and pilgrims, and upon those words the accusers had seized as meaning the Pretender and his companions. Declaring his loyalty to the Throne and taking the oath of allegiance, Charles was allowed to go on his way.

Within seven days of this affair, John Wesley himself was summoned by the 'Justices of Surrey, to appear at their Court at St. Margaret's-hill'. He obeyed the command and with indignation asked: 'Has any one any thing to lay to my charge?' Nobody made reply, and one of the magistrates spoke: 'Sir, are you willing to take the oath to his Majesty, and to sign the declaration against popery?' Without any hesitation, John Wesley complied.²

In Cornwall a few weeks later he found his followers greatly perturbed by the fallacious reports and rumours in circulation against him. Some enemies of Methodism had declared he was in the service of the Pretender, had been seen with him, had even brought him to England under the name of John Downes.³

In August, 1744, the Brecon Assizes in Wales were held. Some local Methodists were charged in their absence with disaffection towards the State. Reporting the occasion, a correspondent in the *London Evening Post* signing himself 'J. H.' expressed the fear that Methodist '*Innovations upon our Religion*, if permitted, may in time bring this once flourishing and happy nation to Ruin and Destruction'. 'J. H.' was quite frank. The charges against the Methodists were the outcome of the remarks made to the Grand Jury by the Judge. 'Persons styl'd *Methodists*', His Lordship most solemnly said, had been 'gathered together by *enthusiastic* Field Preachers', and were 'not tolerated by any legal authority'. 'Our Religion', he added with intolerant pomp, 'was the most substantial Part of our Constitution', but it was far from doing justice and loving mercy! The Grand

¹ C. Wesley's *Journal*.

² *Journal*, March 20, 1744.

³ *Ibid.*, April 7, 1744.

Jury with one accord danced to the Judge's piping; they agreed they 'ought to present every Obstruction to our Holy Religion' which they believed to be 'the most valuable Part of our Constitution'. It was an easy step to denounce Methodists and their 'illegal Field and other meetings' by which they 'collect together great numbers of disorderly Persons, very much endangering the Peace of our Sovereign Lord the King'; the 'Pretended Preachers or Teachers . . . do very much confound and disorder the minds of great numbers of his Majesty's good Subjects which in time may prove a dangerous Tendency even to the Confusion of our establish'd Religion', and might in the end 'threaten the overthrow of our good Government both in Church and State'. Determined therefore to prevent 'this villainous Scheme' from accomplishing its purpose, they drew up a complaint against the houses of John Watkins and Howell Harris. Being rather uncertain that even a 'presentment'¹ would preserve 'the Peace of the Nation', they finally decide to call in the help of 'a Superior Authority'.²

Dangerous and alarming reports concerning John Wesley's supposed support of the Pretender continued to be circulated during 1745. In July of that year, at Tolcarn, Cornwall, he was told that the magistrates of Helston had issued a warrant for his immediate arrest. Perhaps they believed what certain local gentry had been saying to the effect that he had been 'a long time in France and Spain'; that he had been sent to Cornwall 'by the Pretender', and that 'these societies are to join him'.³ Later in the year a doctor in Cheshire confidently declared that Wesley had been with the Pretender in Edinburgh. Wesley was so annoyed by this sheer falsehood that he wrote to the mischievous and gossiping doctor and desired him to have in future a tenderer regard for the truth.⁴

About this time a letter was sent from Temple Bar to the Duke of Newcastle. A Mr. Baron, having just returned to town from Cornwall, took it upon himself to remind His Grace that Cornwall might become an important area in the case of invasion. 'The moment this thought was conceived', he 'suspected the Methodists, who were very numerous in the neighbourhood'. 'Upon further examinations', he continued with pompous assurance, 'I found my Suspicions not Groundless. For from the

¹ A legal term, a statement on oath by a jury.

² *London Evening Post*, September 6-8, 1744. *Gent's. Mag.*, 1744, p. 504.

³ *Journal*, July 4, 1745.

⁴ *Ibid.*, November 8, 1745.

Numbers and Vigilance of the Crafty propagations of this Sect, Their appearing in Lay Habits, Preaching in fields, Having no Visible means to live on, and making no collections for their Support, with a variety of other Circumstances wch then occurred, I concluded they could not belong to the Established Church, And began to conjecture they must have some further view than the Reformation they pretended to in Religion. . . . But learning that these Itinerant Seducers, after distracting ye Heads and Hearts of the Ignorant County people, were taking Lists of their Names and distributing Ticketts amongst them, with this Motto, As Moses Lifted up the Serpent in the Wilderness So must the Son of Man Be Lifted up (A Motto very artfully adapted to have room for an Evasion But can never in my opinion be understood with any Degree of Propriety in Ye Sense meant in Ye Sacred Book) And being credibly Informed, That ye People so Enlisted, gave out, that their Names were to be shown to ye King of France; And that they sho^d soon have the Liberty of Choosing what Estates they Pleased, my Suspicions became at length Confirmed. And I can now look on these Men in no other Light than Emissaries of ye Pretender and King of France, employed to prepare the People to Join the threatened invasion, if made in that Part of the Kingdom, or also to begin a new Insurrection whenever any favourable opportunity may offer.'

The egregious Mr. Baron concluded his recital on the patriotic note, of course: 'The sense I have of the Duty owing to my King and Country obliges me to give your Grace this Information.'¹

The Duke of Newcastle let the letter lie on the table, as the saying is. Mr. Baron exploded in vain. But the magistrates in Cornwall were not passive. By their orders, several Methodist preachers were arrested, some being impressed as soldiers, and at least one imprisoned as a vagrant. However, the whispering campaign of slander and falsehood failed to stop the growth of Methodism in Cornwall; the number of adherents increased and the cause prospered.

John Wesley was in fact ultra-loyalist; a High Churchman and a Tory, his allegiance to the Throne was natural and traditional. In this respect he was a true son of his father. His brother Charles was equally loyal to the Crown. On Monday, September 22, 1740, Charles went out to meet the Kingswood

¹ S.P., 36, 73.

colliers, who were marching towards Bristol with the intention of causing a riot. He came into contact with them on Lawrence Hill: 'They came about me and saluted me very affectionately, not having seen me since my sickness. . . . I got to an eminence and began speaking to them. Many seemed inclined to go back with me to the school; but the devil stirred up his oldest servants, who violently rushed upon the others beating, and tearing, and driving them away from me. I rode up to a ruffian who was striking one of our colliers and prayed him rather to strike me. He would not, he said, for all the world; and was quite overcome. I turned upon one who struck my horse, and he also sank into a lamb. Wherever I turned, Satan lost ground; so that he was obliged to make one general assault, and by the few violent colliers, forced on the quiet ones into the town. I seized on one of the tallest, and earnestly besought him to follow me: that he would, he said, all the world over. About six more I pressed into Christ's service. We met several parties; stopped and exhorted them to join us. We gleaned a few from every company, and grew as we marched along singing to the school.'¹

John Wesley's allegiance was expressed with lucid emphasis in an address to the King, written on Monday, March 5, 1744, at the time when the country was in some agitation about the threatened invasion by France in support of the Pretender. 'We are ready to obey your Majesty to the uttermost', he said, writing on behalf of all the Methodists, 'and we earnestly exhort all with whom we converse as they fear God, to honour the King. We, of the clergy in particular, put all in mind to revere the higher powers as of God; and continually declare ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake. Silver and gold . . . we have none; but such as we have, we humbly beg your Majesty to accept, together with our hearts and prayers.'² In Part 3 in his *Farther Appeal*, John Wesley claimed in reply to a critic that 'all who hear and regard the word we preach "honour the King" for God's sake. They "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's" as well as "unto God the things that are God's". They have no conception of piety without loyalty, knowing "the powers that be are ordained of God".'³

¹ *C. Wesley's Journal*, September 22, 1740.

² *Journal*, March 5, 1744. The address was not in fact delivered, though actually written.

³ *Works*, vol. 8, p. 238.

Writing to the people of Ireland in 1749, Wesley reminded them that the Methodists everywhere manifest 'on the one hand, the most intense love to our country; on the other, the firmest loyalty to our Prince'.¹ 'Hence those who were before of quite the opposite temper, are now generous, disinterested lovers of their country; and faithful, loyal subjects to their Prince, His sacred Majesty King George.'² In harmony with these asseverations, he wrote to the Hon. James West, one of the Secretaries of State, on March 1, 1756, the threat of a French invasion darkening the coasts, and offered to raise two hundred volunteers without cost to the State.³

Wesley was greatly alarmed in 1768 over the condition of the nation. He said that he had heard with his own ears that 'King George ought to be treated as King Charles was'.⁴ Rebuking such, he turned to the Methodists: 'Do you blaspheme God or the King? None of you, I trust, who are in connexion with me. I would no more continue in fellowship with those who continued in such a practice, than with whoremongers, or sabbath-breakers, or thieves, or drunkards, or common swearers.'⁵ Touching on the question whether a minister should preach politics, he replied in the affirmative if it meant refuting slanders against the King. He reproved the habit of speaking against Ministers of the Crown. Those guilty of that conduct wounded the King through them. 'The blame glances from them to him.'⁶ At Plymouth Dock on Thursday, September 7, 1775, he found some measure of prejudice against the King and all his Ministers: 'I spoke freely and largely on the subject at the meeting of the Society. God applied it to their hearts and I think there is not one of them now who does not see these things in another light.'⁷ Replying to critics on the additions to his *Calm Address to our American Colonies*, he asserted that his motive was crystal clear. 'Look around, England is in a flame! A flame of malice and rage against the King, and almost all that are in authority under him. I labour to put out this flame. Ought not every true patriot to do the same?'⁸ In a letter to *Lloyd's Evening Post* explaining why he wrote the *Calm Address*, he denied that it was for money or preferment, either for himself

¹ *Works*, vol. 9, p. 175.

² *Ibid.*, p. 176.

³ J. S. Simon, *Advance of Methodism*, p. 308. J. S. Pawlyn, *Bristol Methodism*, p. 50. Also Wesley's letter in B.M. 32,685 f 64.

⁴ *Works*, vol. 11, p. 16.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 155. *Arminian Magazine*, 1782, p. 152.

⁷ *Journal*.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Saturday, November 11, 1775.

or his brother's children. 'I contributed my mite toward putting out the flame which rages all over the land.'¹ Five weeks later in Bristol he is in debate with 'the so-called patriots'. In York on June 6, 1780, he found the congregation greatly increased because some 'arch-news writer' had published a statement that day about a 'large pension which the famous Wesley received for defending the King'! The statement was entirely untrue, of course, but the local people were so intrigued by the report 'that scores were obliged to go away'.² Towards the end of 1780, Wesley received a request from Lord George Gordon, then in the Tower, to go and see him. He wrote to Lord —, but got no answer. Lord George Gordon repeated the invitation and Wesley wrote to Lord North, who made reply. Wesley sent the letter to Lord — and said, 'I think verily your Lordship knows my Sentiments too well to apprehend any ill consequence of my conversing with Lord George. Especially as I should be very willing to communicate to your Lordship whatever passed in our Conversation.'³ Writing, August 3, 1782, to J. Benson, one of his preachers, Wesley referred to the offer he had made to the Government two or three years before in regard to 'raising some men'. 'The Secretary of War (by the King's order) wrote me word', he commented, 'that it was not necessary; but if ever it should be necessary, His Majesty would let me know.' Somewhat annoyed by the answer, he added: 'I never renewed the offer, and never intended it. But Captain Webb, without my knowing anything of the matter, went to Colonel B—, the new Secretary of War, and renewed that offer. The Colonel (I verily believe, to avoid his importunity) asked him how many men we could raise. But the Colonel is out of place. So the thing is at an end.'⁴ Perhaps the *York Courant* was referring to the same episode in its issue of July 9, 1782: 'The Rev. Mr. Wesley, having offered to assist Government at the Time the Combined Fleet appeared off Plymouth, the proposal was delivered to the Secretary of War, who laid the same before his Majesty in Council, to which his Majesty was pleased to signify his most gracious approbation of the Loyalty and good Intentions of the Methodists, and tho' their services were not required at that time, ordered the Secretary at War to signify to Mr. Wesley by Letter, that in Case of an actual Invasion he would

¹ *Journal*, Monday, November 27, 1775.

² *Ibid.*, Tuesday, June 6, 1780.

³ *S.P.*, 37, 20. This is the first public reference to this letter; it was written on December 15, 1780, at City Road, London.

⁴ *Works*, vol. 12, p. 414.

avail himself of the offer, and in the meantime to request that a Return may be made of Methodists that are willing to assist his Majesty, in Case of Invasion, not to take up Arms, but to act as Pioneers.' 'The proposal', the newspaper explained, 'is to raise three, five or more Companies, consisting of one Captain, one Lieutenant, one Ensign, three Sergeants, three Corporals, two Drummers, and 60 Men each. The Officers to receive Commissions from his Majesty, with the same Pay as the rest of the Army. The Men's pay to be proportioned according to what they can earn at home upon an average.' Chaplains were to be appointed, and notice of the arrangements were to be sent to all the Methodist Societies. Many Cornish Methodists had already given in their names. A good response was also secured at Leeds. 'The Corps of Volunteers forming at Leeds go on with Spirit. They are now a considerable number, and exercise every Day under the Inspection of an able and experienced Officer, who spares no Pains to bring them to that Point, when they will rank as the Defenders of their Country, and convince our numerous Enemies, that British Valour is still a characteristic of its Sons.' A later edition of the *York Courant* added 'that the Rev. John Wesley, in case of an Invasion, can assist Government with at least 20,000 men'.¹

Mr. T. Crawford, a Government official in Bristol, sent a long letter to Mr. T. Brumwell in London. How little the writer of that letter knew the character and integrity of his Wesley. He thought that the founder's immense influence on Methodism and over the Methodists might be harnessed to narrow and selfish political ends. 'Prodigious crowd of People . . . depend upon and look up to John Wesley.' How easy, therefore, went on the egregious Crawford, for such a man to use his influence over these people 'by dipping his Tongue or his Pen, either in Honey or in Gall'. 'Perhaps a trifle to secure his good word and the enthusiastick opinion of his followers might not be thrown away!' According to this epistolary serpent, John Wesley had some influence with Lord Nugent, but that influence had been used by Wesley to get his own nephew, named Ellison, into the position as Landweiler in Bristol. In addition, Wesley had also written to Lord North concerning the nephew's son, 'Thomas Farr Ellison, a fine young fellow about 20, who has been for some time a writer at a low salary in one of the offices at the Custom House. . . . trusting that he was not forgotten'. On the

¹ July 20, 1782.

death of the Landweiler, Wesley had written again to Lord North suggesting that the claims and merits of the young man had been overlooked. Wesley also wrote to Thomas Farr Ellison telling him of his endeavour to get him promotion. Somehow Mr. Crawford got possession of this letter to Ellison and sent it to Brumwell with the suggestion that the latter might use it in his contact with Lord North; further that 'should his Lordship think the old man' (meaning John Wesley) 'worth attending to . . . he may attack him strongly'. In the archives of the Home Office there's no trace of Wesley's letters. John Wesley, always willing to help his relatives, never would have sold his soul for the sake of family friends, money, or the whole House of Lords.¹

Wesley was so deeply attached to the Throne that sometimes he would go to the extreme in his professions of affection. The *Leeds Intelligencer* reported one of Wesley's tours through parts of the West Riding: 'The venerable old man one evening portrayed the Royal pair in colours most brilliant! And also dwelt much upon the aimiableness of the disposition of the Royal Highness the Prince of Wales. He spoke very forcibly upon the late indisposition of his King—and concluded his eulogium with the following emphatic words, *That if the best of Kings—the most virtuous of Queens—and the most perfect Constitution*, could make any nation happy, the people of this country had every reason to think themselves so.'²

John Wesley insisted that his followers must show proof of their allegiance to the Crown. Every form of disaffection to the State was strictly and severely and instantly condemned. So were habits hurtful to the State—smuggling, for instance. 'Extirpate smuggling', the Conference of 1744 commanded. 'Let no person remain with us who will not totally abstain from every kind and degree of it.'³ Regarding the evil as being on a level with thieving and highway robbery, Wesley didn't mince his words: 'Whatever is taken from the King, is in effect taken from the country.' Smugglers 'are therefore general robbers. They rob you and me and every one of their countrymen; seeing that had the King his due, customs, a great part of our taxes might be spared. A smuggler, then, (and in proportion every seller, or buyer of uncustomed goods,) is a thief of the first order, a highwayman or pickpocket of the worst sort.'⁴ In a pamphlet,

¹ H.O., 42, 3.

² May 4, 1790

³ W. Peirce, *The Ecclesiastical Principles and Polity of Wesleyan Methodism*, p. 41.

⁴ *Works*, vol. 9, p. 226.

The Word to a Smuggler, the language was equally vigorous: 'Open smuggling is robbing on the highway . . . a smuggler of this kind is no honester than a highwayman. They may shake hands together. . . . Private smuggling is just the same as picking of pockets. There is full as much harm in this as in that. A smuggler of this kind is no honester than a pickpocket. These may shake hands together. But open smugglers are worse than common highwaymen, and private smugglers are worse than common pickpockets. For it is undoubtedly worse to rob our father than one we have no obligation to. . . . King George is the father of all his subjects; and not only so, but he is a good father.'¹ What was decided by law rightly belonged to the King; so it came to pass, Wesley argued, that 'you are as much a thief if you take his duties, as a man is that takes your coat. . . . Custom is by the laws of England due to the King; therefore everyone in England is bound to pay it to him. So that robbing the King herein is abundantly worse than common stealing, or common robbing on the highway.' 'It is in effect not only robbing the King, but robbing every honest man in the nation. For the more the King's duties are diminished, the more the taxes must be increased. Therefore every smuggler is a thief general, who picks the pockets both of the King and all his fellow subjects.'²

Smuggling was exceedingly prevalent, perhaps rampant, throughout the greater part of the eighteenth century. To suppress it was a very difficult problem. Its roots and being were in the widespread poverty among the common people and the increasingly heavy taxation levied upon imported goods. In spite of severe and even harsh penalties threatened against offenders, the evil of smuggling continued to thwart the Government's efforts to weed it out. When John Wesley established Methodist Societies in coastal towns, he came face to face with the practice; some of the members engaged in it. At St. Ives in Cornwall, on Wednesday, July 25, 1753, he 'found an accursed thing among them; well nigh one and all bought or sold uncustomed goods. I therefore delayed speaking to any more till I had met them altogether. This I did in the evening, and told them plainly, either they must put this abomination away, or they would see my face no more.'³ On the Friday following he is glad to make record of the fact that 'They severally promised so to do; so I trust this plague is stopped'.⁴

¹ *Works*, vol. 11, p. 174.² *Ibid.*, p. 175.³ *Journal*.⁴ *Ibid.*, July 27, 1753.

But fourteen years later the evil persisted in some Methodist centres and circles. Conference in 1767 discussed the matter: 'How shall we put a stop to smuggling?' 'Speak tenderly and frequently of it', was the answer. 'And do it in every Society near the coasts.' The preachers were requested to dispose of copies of *The Word to a Smuggler* at every opportunity, to 'expel all those who will not leave it off', and to 'silence every Local Preacher who defends it'.¹

Wesley told Joseph Benson in January 1777 to be ruthless with the pruning knife: 'The matter is short, I require you to meet the societies of Sunderland and Shields next quarter, and to give no tickets to any person who will not promise neither to buy nor sell uncustomed goods any more.'² The Minutes of Conferences from 1744 to 1789, republished in 1791, prove that the instruction issuing from the Conference in 1767 was still in force. In due time, but not without great difficulty and constant vigilance, Methodist discipline gained the victory and smuggling was entirely extirpated from among the Methodist people.

Another evil which the Methodists tried to suppress was that of political bribery. Giving money and refreshments to voters at elections was a curse and custom widespread and tenacious. Candidates strove in boisterous revels and orgies of bribery to get to Westminster. Progress to Parliament was a Bacchanalian. John Wesley and his supporters roundly and constantly condemned the practice. 'Extirpate bribery', sounded clear and strong from the very first Conference. 'The receiving anything directly or indirectly for voting in any election' must not be allowed among the Methodist people. All the preachers were told to 'show no respect of persons herein', but to 'expel all who touch the accursed thing'. The command was to be 'particularly observed at Grimsby and St. Ives'.³ Expounding the Conference injunction, Wesley urged his followers to 'show both in public and private the wickedness of thus selling our country'. Everywhere they were advised to read *The Word to a Freeholder* and 'disperse it with both hands'.⁴ In that particular pamphlet, Wesley, as was his wont, went to the heart of the matter: 'I hope you have taken no money. . . . I hope you have received

¹ Myles, *Chronological History of the Methodists*, p. 121. W. Peirce, *The Ecclesiastical Principles and Polity of Wesleyan Methodism*, p. 41.

² *Works*, vol. 12, p. 410.

³ W. Peirce, *The Ecclesiastical Principles and Polity of Wesleyan Methodism*, p. 41.

⁴ *Works*, vol. 8, p. 308.

nothing else, neither will receive no entertainment, no meat or drink.'¹ As a general principle, the voter, he added, ought to cast his vote for the person who truly loves God and his country. If none of the candidates possessed that qualification, the vote should be given 'for him that loves the King, King George, whom the wise providence of God has appointed to reign over us'.² Calling together Methodist freeholders of Bristol on Thursday, October 6, 1774, Wesley besought them 'to vote, without fee or reward, for the person they judged most worthy; to speak no evil of the person they voted against; and to take care their spirits were not sharpened against those who voted on the other side.'³ J. S. Simon comments that 'Wesley's influence in Bristol was great', and adds the belief 'that the Methodists there accepted his counsels'. It was also probable that Wesley distributed among them his *Word to a Freeholder*, 'a tract that had done good service at elections since 1747, when it was written'.⁴

The Conference in 1787 put itself the question, 'How may we prevent bribery at the ensuing Election for Members of Parliament?' The threefold answer was: '1. Largely shew the wickedness of thus selling our country in every society. 2. Do the same thing in private conversation. 3. Read everywhere the *Word to a Freeholder*, and disperse it as it were with both hands.'⁵

After 1791, when the Methodists were deprived of the example and counsel of John Wesley, the Movement was emphatic and exemplary in loyalty to the Throne and obedience to the Constitution. 'What directions shall be given concerning our conduct to the Civil Government?' was the question posed to Conference in 1792. The answer ran: '1. None of us shall, either in writing or conversation, speak lightly or irreverently of the Government under which he lives. 2. We are to observe, that the Oracles of God command to be faithful to the higher powers: and that honour to the King is there connected with the fear of God.'⁶ Similar sentiments were expressed at the following Conference. The *Leeds Intelligencer* observed that 'their attachment to their King and Country was frequently expressed in the warmest terms'.⁷ The Conference address published in full contained

¹ *Works*, vol. 11, p. 196.

² *Ibid.*, p. 196.

³ *Journal*.

⁴ J. S. Simon, *The Last Phase*, p. 45.

⁵ Myles, *Chronological History of the Methodists*, p. 121.

⁶ *Arminian Magazine*, 1792, p. 493. W. Peirce, *The Ecclesiastical Principles and Polity of Wesleyan Methodism*, pp. 38-9.

⁷ August 5, 1793.

these words: 'We feel the most unfeigned loyalty to the King and a sincere attachment to the Constitution. We reverence the Government; are conscious of the many blessings we enjoy under our precious Sovereign, and are thankful to God for them; and do earnestly and sincerely recommend the same principles and spirit to you', namely to Methodist throughout the land.¹

Again, at the Conference in 1794, in answer to the interrogation, 'Is it necessary to make any observations on the present important crisis of public affairs?' the reply was: 'We most affectionately intreat all our Brethren, in the name of God, to honour the King. Let us daily pray for our Rulers, and submit ourselves to every ordinance for the Lord's sake.'² In regard to public affairs at that time, one authority declared that the piety of the Methodists 'would prevent them from having any hand either directly or indirectly in any thing that would have the least tendency to disturb the quiet of the nation'. 'Their prayers are daily offered up for the happiness of King George and the prosperity of his dominions.'³

Conference met again in Leeds in 1797 and 'came to a resolution that if any of the members of their Societies should maintain and propagate opinions inimical to the civil Government and established religion of the country, they should no longer be considered as having fellowship or connection with them, but that all such should be desired quietly to withdraw themselves from the societies; which if they refused to do, and continued to act contrary to the spirit of this resolution, that they should be forthwith expelled; it being unanimously determined that the societies should not become a nursery of sedition, or the disturbers of public weal.'⁴

Loyalty to King and country was stressed anew at the Conference of 1798. Replying to the address transmitted from the Irish Conference, the pronouncement was: 'We join issue with you in blessing God for the mild and peaceful Government under which we live. This calls forth our gratitude to God and our Rulers, and fills us with a determined ardour to do all in our power to suppress whatever tends to molest the quiet of the best of kings, or derange, in any degree, the happiest of all civil Constitutions. We never forget to "lead quiet and peaceable

¹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, August 12, 1793.

² Myles, *Chronological History of the Methodists*, p. 226.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 478.

⁴ *Leeds Intelligencer*, September 4, 1797. *York Courant*, September 4, 1797.

lives in all godliness and honesty. We must pray for Kings and for all that are in Authority." ¹

'We can truly say, we enjoy all the religious privileges, which reasonable persons can desire: And we cannot too often impress on your minds as well as our own the gratitude which is due to our Sovereign, and the duty of continuing in that spirit of loyalty which has been our distinguishing character.'² Such were the words of Conference in 1799.

The pronouncements of Conference were implemented. They were not mere rhetoric. In Methodist Societies signs of disaffection toward Throne or Constitution brought drastic discipline into play. The Rev. Dr. Coke, in a letter to the Earl of Dartmouth, gave the fact that three Methodists had been expelled from a Methodist Society solely on account of their democratic sentiments.³

Methodists in Hull were typical. During 1798, the country supposed to be in danger of a Napoleonic invasion, some Methodists in that city, led by Joseph Benson, a preacher, decided to open a subscription for national defence. In a very short time no less a sum than £740 was raised.⁴

The consequences following upon such teaching, such emphasis, such discipline were considerable in the history of the English people. Taking hold on the lowest strata in the commonwealth, Methodist influence leavened the rough lump with ideas and principles of civic order, integrity and seemliness. So far as Methodists were concerned, King and Government had nothing to fear from riots and revolutions; they were on the side of law and order; the mind of John Wesley was in them. Methodist leaders and preachers have been criticized because of their attitude and allegiance to King and State in a century when conditions in which the working classes endured a meagre and cruel and exasperating existence, conditions which cried out to high heaven to be righted. But the judgement of historians must surely be that the first necessity at that period of time was that the members of Methodist Societies should by means of obedience and discipline learn the virtues of self-control and self-government. On such foundations they would be building better than they knew; they would be preparing and training themselves, as indeed they were, for a fuller citizenship in an England worthier to be loved and served. Looking back, one is

¹ *Methodist Magazine*, 1798, p. 548.

² *Ibid.*, 1799, p. 515.

³ *H.O.*, 42, 61.

⁴ *Wesley Historical Society Proceedings*, vol. 12, p. 124.

aware that Methodism took a large and noble risk by entrusting opportunity, office, and responsibility to those ill-fitted and ill-suited, as it might have seemed, to bear such burdens, but once again, as St. Paul had remarked in memorable words centuries before, God's foolishness was wiser than the wisdom of men. There is that of miracle in the development of Methodism.

CONCLUSION

THE eighteenth century saw the creation and unfolding of a new religious denomination whose parentage and birth were in the Established Church. To that Church allegiance was expressed; the Movement was guided and sponsored in the beginnings by faithful clergymen. For a considerable period of time Methodists refrained from allowing the hours of their public services to clash with those in the ritual of the Church of England. What is more, members and adherents in Methodist Societies were advised and urged to attend the ordinances of the Church; out of respect and reverence for the Church, Methodists neither regarded nor called their preachers ministers of religion. Only ordained clergymen were allowed, except in special cases, to administer in their midst the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper and perform the rite of baptism. When ultimately a demand was made for a removal of these prohibitions, the Connexion was almost broken to pieces; the first split in the Movement came from such debate and argument. In spite of these professions and acts of loyalty and affection to the Anglican Establishment the leaders of the Church frowned upon Methodism, criticized the pioneers, finally drove it out into the wilderness and into independence. Unwilling to ally itself with the Dissenting denominations, Methodism tried to steer a middle course between Church and Nonconformity, but in the early decades of the nineteenth century events carried it further away from the Church, bringing it nearer to the Dissenters.

Methodism gained its greatest successes amongst the socially distressed and ostracized, among the labouring masses. Never claiming to be a class or partisan Movement, always emphasizing the universal love of God, its most urgent appeals

were addressed to the common people, to the multitudes who were as sheep without a shepherd. Methodist preachers and evangelists went out into the highways and byways to minister to the forsaken and the destitute, the poor and neglected. The higher classes in English society were scarcely touched by Methodist influence, but the working men and women were profoundly affected.

Most important in effect and consequence was the increasing use Methodism made of the talents and genius hidden and submerged in darkest England. Religious denominations had almost entirely neglected these potentialities, which Methodism released and utilized. Gray's famous 'Elegy' can be seen in reverse; in his poem gifts and abilities that awaited but the grave found opportunities in which latent powers flowered and bore fruit. Only few ordained ministers in the Church of England were willing and ready to give help and encouragement to the new evangelistic Movement; John Wesley found himself more and more persuaded by the necessities of the case to engage and employ the energies of the lowly and untrained. The experiment was daring and astonishing, full of risks and perils, but faith was justified. Fresh wells of living water were discovered, hidden resources tapped. In due time the very existence of Methodism, not to speak of success, largely depended on the talents of laymen. Other movements, whether religious or political, gradually came to recognize the results of the experiment; in a sense the century of the forgotten man had begun; he found a place and position in religious, social, political, and economic endeavours and destinies.

Of course Methodism had to train its people; they had to be taught the elementary principles of life as individuals in families, as citizens in townships. Some of the methods employed in the processes of training may appear to modern observers to have been extremely severe, perhaps dictatorial, but the Methodist leaders were wise in their day and generation; they preached, they sang, about heaven and hell, but they were not blind to the realities of the times. To many—sadly many—in the eighteenth century, death was at the doorstep day by day. Men and women, boys and girls, in the lower strata of society had but little lease of life. Disease, ignorance, squalor, economic distress, bitter penury compelled the death rate to a grim and appalling total in some areas. The number of deaths was seldom far below the number of births. Life was a cheap and

fugitive thing. If early Methodists were concerned about the life beyond, perhaps they were conscious with what speed time swept on bearing all its sons away. But the fact is that they never neglected the duties and responsibilities of the present hour; they prayed, they planned, they strove, they banded themselves together to do the tasks that were nearest and most pressing in humane, compassionate importunity. They learned the essentials guaranteeing the development of a quiet, orderly, and useful life. Duties were placed before individual rights; responsibilities took precedence of requirements. Exhorted and encouraged to seek with diligence the salvation of their own souls, they were commanded to bear one another's burdens and be good neighbours and loyal citizens. The emphasis on duty to be done here and now and the yoke to be borne awoke in due time a social conscience which gradually evolved, to the good of England in a hundred ways. That social conscience when it became lively, excited in turn a sympathetic interest and philanthropy in ever-widening circles. Social, political and economic reforms were certain to follow in due time and sequence. The influence and inspiration of Methodism in this regard have not yet been adequately recognized. A further point must be made. The steadiness and loyalty of Methodist people in days of riot and revolution saved England from the calamity that fell upon France. Most authorities acknowledge the truth of that claim and there is no need to enlarge upon it except to say that loyalty was engendered and maintained when the sheer wretchedness of conditions made it an almost impossible virtue and a strange flower among the distressed poor.

Perhaps the main conclusion to be drawn from a thorough historical study of the period is that the Methodism of John Wesley proved itself to be the most powerful and active understanding friend the working masses had during the whole of the eighteenth century. The strength and sincerity of that friendship were proved by the manifold material and moral benefits accruing to the despised and forsaken. A highway was built for the wayfaring man. Such a verdict is in direct conflict, of course, with the *Weekly Miscellany*, the *Norwich Mercury*, the *Gentleman's Magazine*—for example, the writings of Bishop Lavington and other Church of England divines. Blind and bitter prejudice, the alarm of vested interests, the fear lest Methodism might do great harm to Church and State together explain much. Gradually the mischievous and poisonous mists

rolled away. History came to have a clear view of the whole landscape. Passing strange, therefore, that Marjorie Bowen, in very recent years, should have made an attack of some vehemence on the motives, methods, and integrity of John Wesley and his followers, pouring scorn upon the acknowledged achievements. Did the Methodists become better citizens? No, says the novelist. 'The virtues of Methodism . . . soon sharpened into vices. Conviction became intolerance, the sense of divine guidance became arrogance, simplicity became ignorance, austerity became fanaticism, living by rule meant a severe and merciless system to enforce these rules, sometimes espionage, sometimes tyranny.' Those who accepted the system 'led a narrow, joyless, repellent creed, which deliberately closed the eyes of its followers, and not only their eyes, but their hearts and spirits, against almost everything that made for human satisfaction, happiness and nobility'.¹ It is a wild whirl of insubstantial rhetoric. 'John Wesley', she must admit, 'taught his followers some rules of conduct excellent in themselves', but they embraced 'only one side of existence'.² 'It has been estimated that in the period during which John Wesley worked nearly half the population were paupers; it was these unemployed outcasts and criminals to whom the evangelist appealed, giving them religion as a drug and a comfort.' There seems to be something borrowed from Karl Marx in that last phrase; it has a familiar ring. 'Whether it was good or evil that John Wesley so drugged and stunned the illiterate poor with his preaching of Hell fire, a sentimental "love of God", and his doctrine of a life according to rigid rules as the only means of salvation may be a matter of dispute'.³ She is not very sure about what answer to make in reference to the visits to the prisoners undertaken by John Wesley and his followers; whether they 'were in the nature of consolation to the victims of eighteenth-century justice or merely added torments' she is hesitant to say.⁴ 'John Wesley', she concludes, 'took advantage of that religious emotion he was able to rouse in the wretched and ignorant to implant some terrible falsehoods in their shivering hearts; the most dreadful of these was hell.'⁵ Miss Bowen writes vividly.

Friendship and concern for the common people was a rare quality in those eighteenth century days. Very seldom was it

¹ *Wrestling Jacob*, p. 256.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

² *Ibid.*, p. 317.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

expressed in Parliamentary discussion and legislation; it was not shown in the penal codes and the judicial administration; it found no place in the Poor Law nor in local life; never was it advocated by statesmen and politicians; authors and journalists left it out of count. If a voice were raised at all on behalf of the poor and friendless, it was as the voice of one crying in the wilderness. Religious institutions at the beginning of the century tended to leave the poor out of their thought and benevolence. In congregations attending the Established Churches, the poor were sometimes to be found, but always without voice, influence or place. Only in the meeting-houses of the Dissenters did they get any measure of recognition, but they were a helpless minority. The century was not barren of individual charity, but as a rule it was given out of necessity and not out of sympathy; for the most part it was to keep the poor quiet and orderly; it was 'a drug and a comfort', to take Miss Bowen's phrase. Towards the end of the century, charitable institutions multiplied, largely as the result of religious concern and impetus. John Wesley's quickening spirit and example had not been in vain.

Against the lack of sympathy for the depressed classes, the positive and impassioned concern of the Methodists was as noonday to midnight. They sought them out in garrets and cellars, prisons and workhouses; they visited them in lonely places of squalor and crowded areas of destitution, in highways and in byways; they carried to the despised the gospel of Divine Love and Compassion; they manifested lovingkindness to them and gave emphasis to each man's innate dignity; they invited them to their preaching-houses and asked them to join their Societies and find companionship and friendship; they provided opportunities for them to exercise their gifts in a growing fellowship. By means of Methodism, the forsaken and forgotten multitudes entered into a twofold and transforming faith, belief in God and belief in God's purposes for mankind, beginning with themselves. They were rescued from moral and social paralysis; it was the miracle of the healing of the withered arm. Their mental quiescence was broken; their hearts and minds awoke as to a dayspring; they discovered their hidden talents and developed their latent powers. Under the inspiration, the discipline, the encouragement and tutorship of Methodism they accepted responsibilities and carried out duties. They entered into positions of trusteeship and leadership; they took part in

spiritual and social enterprises. Never before had such value and importance been placed on the gifts and services of the poor and downtrodden. From what was a dry land and wilderness in the eyes of the eighteenth century, the Methodists called forth a wealth of living waters; the flint in the ancient figure of speech became a fountain. What had seemed worthless and was so regarded was exalted into citizenship and quickened with the wish and will to seek the welfare of the community as a whole.

So did John Wesley's apostleship reveal fresh reservoirs of human potentialities, and England was for ever enriched. From these reservoirs there issued energies to fertilize, develop, and invigorate the religious life of the whole land. Vitality and cleansing came anew to the Established Church and strength and vigour were added to the Dissenting denominations. The parched ground became a pool. Missionary fervour was fed and old roots sent up sap and strength as when the year is at the spring. The influence flowed far beyond the national boundaries, passing across the seas to the West Indies and America, to Ceylon and other islands and nations. At home the whole meaning of the Methodist Movement penetrated far and wide, finding especial welcome among the people in the northern counties. Promise and possibility of reforms in social, political, and economic spheres of the nation's life were implicit; the waters whispered of the future. The best was yet to be. In due time, the Commonwealth, and in particular the submerged classes, destitute and despised, began to see the beginnings of the harvests resulting in human social good. Methodism in the eighteenth century, hard and harsh and cruel as that century was when viewed from the depths, bore warm and faithful witness to a gospel of individual, national, and international redemption. And it bore that witness, not in word only, but, as the records prove and history testifies, in loveliness of gracious deeds. The beauty of the Lord was on the works of its hands.

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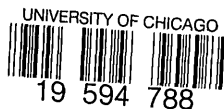
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